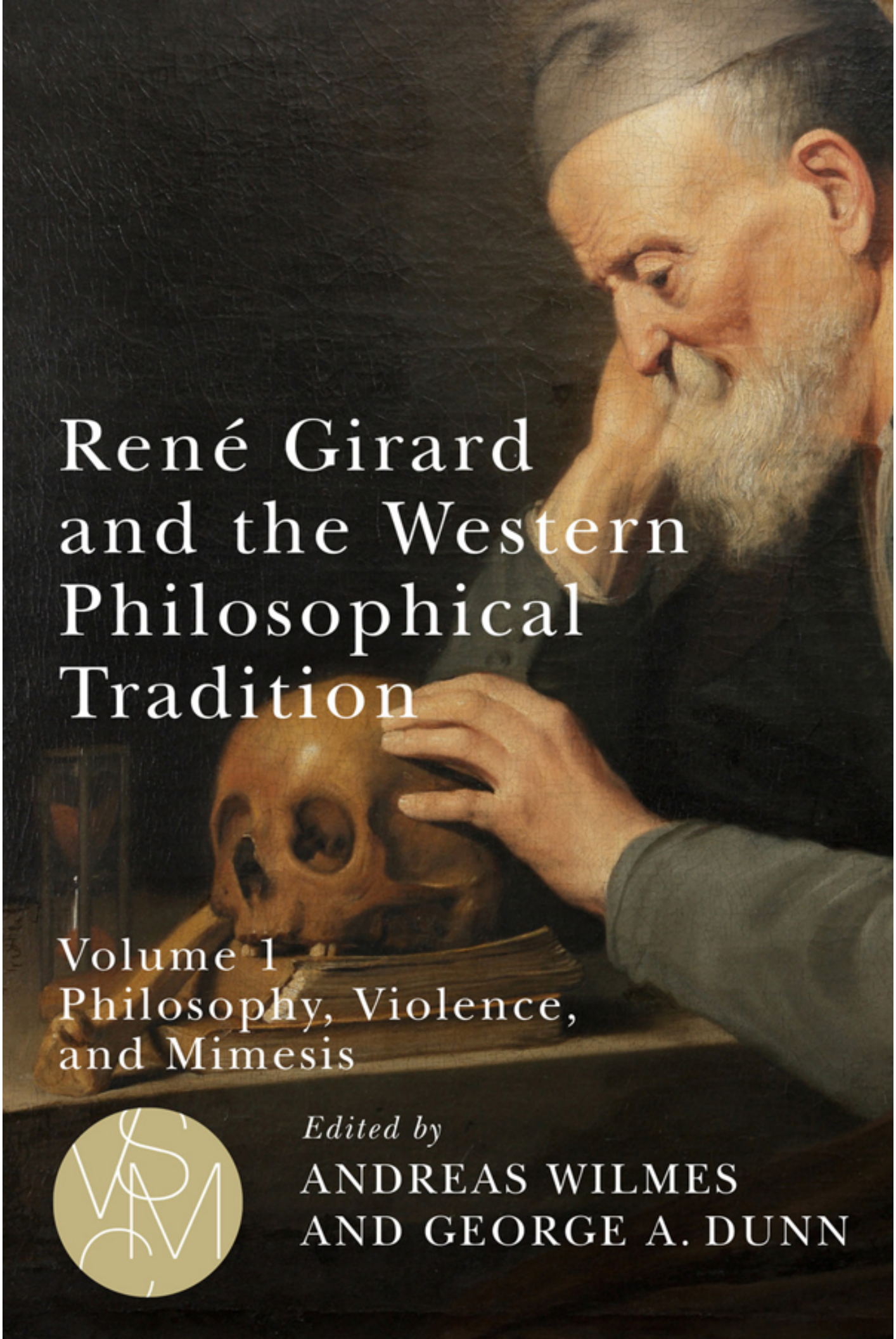
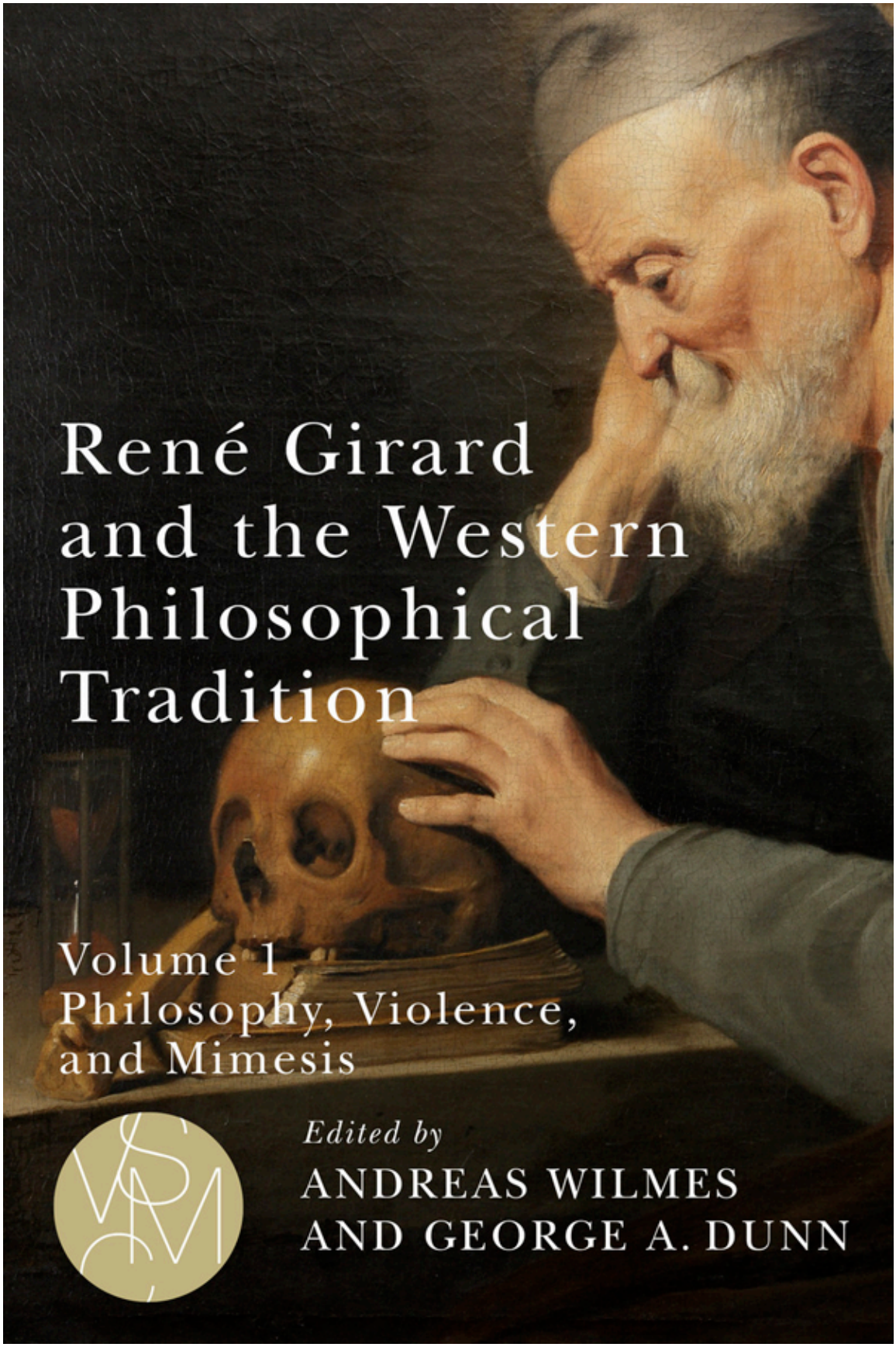


René Girard and the Western Philosophical Tradition

Volume 1
Philosophy, Violence, and Mimesis

Edited by

ANDREAS WILMES
AND GEORGE A. DUNN


René Girard
and the Western
Philosophical
Tradition
Volume 1
Philosophy, Violence,
and Mimesis
Edited by
ANDREAS WILMES
AND GEORGE A. DUNN

STUDIES IN VIOLENCE, MIMESIS, AND CULTURE

SERIES EDITOR

William A. Johnsen

The Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture Series examines issues related to the nexus of violence and religion in the genesis and maintenance of culture. It furthers the agenda of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, an international association that draws inspiration from René Girard's mimetic hypothesis on the relationship between violence and religion, elaborated in a stunning series of books he has written over the last forty years. Readers interested in this area of research can also look to the association's journal, *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture.*

ADVISORY BOARD

René Girard†, *Stanford University*
Andrew McKenna, *Loyola University of Chicago*
Raymund Schwager†, *University of Innsbruck*
James Williams, *Syracuse University*

EDITORIAL BOARD

Rebecca Adams, *Independent Scholar*
Jeremiah L. Alberg, *International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan*
Mark Anspach, *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris*
Pierpaolo Antonello, *University of Cambridge*
Ann Astell, *University of Notre Dame*
Cesáreo Bandera, *University of North Carolina*
Maria Stella Barberi, *Università di Messina*
Alexei Bodrov, *St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute, Moscow*
João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*
Benoît Chantre, *L'Association Recherches Mimétiques*
Diana Culbertson, *Kent State University*
Paul Dumouchel, *Ritsumeikan University*
Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Stanford University, École Polytechnique*
Giuseppe Fornari, *Università degli studi di Verona*
Eric Gans, *University of California, Los Angeles*
Sandor Goodhart, *Purdue University*
Robert Hamerton-Kelly†, *Stanford University*
Hans Jensen, *Aarhus University, Denmark*
Mark Juergensmeyer, *University of California, Santa Barbara*
Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *Shaw University*
Michael Kirwan, SJ, *Heythrop College, University of London*
Paisley Livingston, *Lingnan University, Hong Kong*
Charles Mabee, *Ecumenical Theological Seminary, Detroit*
Józef Niewiadomski, *Universität Innsbruck*

Wolfgang Palaver, *Universität Innsbruck*
Ángel Jorge Barahona Plaza, *Universidad Francisco de Vitoria*
Martha Reineke, *University of Northern Iowa*
Tobin Siebers†, *University of Michigan*
Thee Smith, *Emory University*
Mark Wallace, *Swarthmore College*
Eugene Webb, *University of Washington*

René Girard and the Western Philosophical Tradition

Volume 1. Philosophy, Violence, and Mimesis

Edited by Andreas Wilmes and George A. Dunn

Michigan State University Press
East Lansing

Copyright © 2024 by Andreas Wilmes and George A. Dunn

Michigan State University Press
East Lansing, Michigan 48823-5245

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.
ISBN 978-1-61186-495-3 (PAPERBACK)
ISBN 978-1-60917-764-5 (PDF)
ISBN 978-1-62895-525-5 (EPUB)

Cover design by David Drummond, Salamander Design, www.salamanderhill.com.
Cover art: A Philosopher Contemplating Mortality attributed to Hendrik Bloemart (Utrecht c.1601–Utrecht 1672), CMS_PCF_509829, Collections–Public, © National Trust.

Visit Michigan State University Press at *msupress.org*

Contents

FOREWORD, *George A. Dunn*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Plato, *Sherwood Belangia*

Augustine of Hippo, *Thomas Ryba*

Niccolò Machiavelli, *Harald Wydra*

Thomas Hobbes, *Wolfgang Palaver*

Blaise Pascal, *Christine Orsini*

Baruch Spinoza, *Stéphane Vinolo*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Jeremiah Alberg*

Adam Smith, *Jean-Pierre Dupuy*

Immanuel Kant, *Jeremiah Alberg*

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Andreas Wilmes*

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Tania Checchi*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Jean-Marc Bourdin*

Søren Kierkegaard, *Charles K. Bellinger*

René Girard, *Andreas Wilmes*

CONTRIBUTORS

Foreword

George A. Dunn

RENÉ GIRARD WAS ONE OF THE GREAT THINKERS OF OUR TIME, HOWever difficult his thought may be to classify. Though his early academic training was in history, his initial discoveries in mimetic theory came out of his study of literature, a result of his close reading of the modern novels he had been assigned to teach as a young professor. His first book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* traced the evolution of the modern novel through Cervantes, Flaubert, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, and Proust. It announced its thesis in its opening pages: "The great novelists reveal the imitative nature of desire."[1] One of Girard's claims in this book is that there are insights in great works of literature that cut deeper than those available in philosophy. "The novelist's art is a phenomenological *epochē*," he writes. "But the only authentic *epochē* is never mentioned by modern philosophers; it is always victory over desire, victory over Promethean pride."[2] This victory is enabled by the great insight on which all of these great novels converge, though they express it in different ways. They expose the modern belief in the quasi-divine autonomy of the human subject as a lie constructed to shelter our pride, for in truth the desires that we take to be the deepest expressions of our true selves are not our own. We do not choose our objects of desire spontaneously, but in obedience to cues supplied by some mediator, whom we imagine to possess a superior store of being. "The object is only a means of reaching the mediator," Girard writes. "The desire is aimed at the mediator's *being*."[3]

Deceit, Desire, and the Novel is also a work of social history—one might even say *spiritual* history—that chronicles the vicissitudes of modern

desire as the locus of mediation shifts. Heroes like Don Quixote's beloved Amadis of Gaul inspire devotion and emulation while occupying a realm that never intersects with his disciple's, a relationship that Girard calls *external* mediation. But, as the modern world destroys all transcendent divinities and the prophecy that "*men will be gods for each other*" starts to come true,[4] our mediators become closer, as seen in the idolatrous fascination that characters like Stendhal's Julien Sorel and Dostoevsky's Underground Man have for their near peers. This *internal* mediation gives rise to what Girard calls mimetic rivalry, in which hostilities erupt due to our imitating each other's desires for objects we are either unable or unwilling to share. The shift from external mediation to internal mediation, from distant to proximate mediators, marks the development of the modern novel, which in turn mirrors the trajectory of modern society as traditional social hierarchies give way to the new ideal of equality. According to Girard, "it is in internal mediation that the profoundest meaning of the modern is found."[5]

At the time of writing *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard had recently returned to the Roman Catholic faith of his youth, so this work defends an essentially religious conception of the human condition in opposition to the modern romantic stance that Girard calls "deviated transcendency," a caricatured image of the "vertical transcendency" of religious devotion. A polemic runs throughout this work against the philosophers of the Enlightenment, who naively assumed that casting off our old superstitions would set us free. But the autonomy they offered has proved to be a false promise and a dead end. "Denial of God does not eliminate transcendency," writes Girard, "but diverts it from the *au-delà* to the *en-deçà* [from the above to the below]. The imitation of Christ becomes the imitation of one's neighbor."[6] In place of a vertical mediator who liberates us from bondage to falsehood, we become enslaved to idols we construct in each other's image.

Girard would later find this same set of insights in other writers, most notably in William Shakespeare, whom Girard believed had grasped the essential truth of mimetic desire very early in his career. Shakespeare's plays also dramatize "the force that periodically destroys the differential system of culture and brings it back into being, namely, the mimetic crisis, which he calls a crisis of *Degree*."[7] That force became a theme for Girard beginning with his second book, *Violence and the Sacred*. One of the great leitmotifs of Shakespeare's plays, according to Girard, is the collapse of the

hierarchical social order on which the stability of society depends, for it holds in check the rivalries that would otherwise wreak havoc on society. A man of the Renaissance, Shakespeare lived through a time of rapid social transition and may have been prescient enough to recognize that the days of the old order were numbered. Yet, when seeking to account for this collapse of degree, Girard looks not to the modern philosophers who challenged to the ancien régime, but to the influence of the biblical text, which had for centuries been discrediting the religious bases for social inequality and decomposing the society based on them.[8]

By the time Girard began his study of Shakespeare, he had already broadened the scope of his research to cut a path through such diverse fields as cultural anthropology, comparative mythology, religious studies, biblical exegesis, theology, psychology, social and political history, and contemporary politics, riding roughshod over conventional disciplinary boundaries. But in whatever field he was working, the critical analysis of texts, most often literary texts, always remained his primary modus operandi. In *Violence and the Sacred*, he turned to archaic myths and classical Greek tragedy to uncover the mechanism that he believed gave birth to archaic religion and that generates and undergirds all of human culture: the scapegoat mechanism, in which the collective murder of an arbitrarily chosen scapegoat resolves the mimetic crisis that results when contagious desires run rampant. A few years later, in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, he recapitulated much of the argument of his previous books, but added a new twist. Openly declaring his Christian faith for the first time, Girard argued that the biblical text—or at least portions of it—reveal the truth about the scapegoat mechanism that archaic myths obscure. While the latter preserve the memory of the founding murder in a distorted fashion, depicting a criminal scapegoat eliminated by an innocent community, the biblical text reveals the suppressed truth in which these myths are grounded.

As in his first book, one of his polemical targets is philosophy, though not modern philosophy with its deceptive promises of metaphysical autonomy, but the philosophy that arose in ancient Greece, which he believed failed precisely where the biblical text succeeded. Despite Plato's stature as *the* thinker who has singlehandedly "determined once and for all the cultural meaning of imitation" in the Western world,[9] Girard argues that he bequeathed to us a severely truncated understanding of mimetic

phenomena that ignores the essential dimension of acquisitive mimesis as a driver of conflict. In common with primitive religion, Plato had an inchoate "fear of mimesis" that we can discern in his "mistrust of art," yet he "is also deceived by mimesis because he can't succeed in understanding his fear," due to the fact that he "never relates conflict to acquisitive mimesis."[10] However, Girard reads Plato's dialogues as if they were ordinary philosophical monographs dressed up as dramas, for which the dialogue form is just an incidental ornamentation rather than integral to Plato's mode of communication. Yet, when we read the dialogues as dramas that depict specific human beings confronting problems in concrete settings, Plato comes to light as having much in common with the novelists and playwrights to whom Girard has devoted so much attention, with similar insights into the imitative nature of acquisitive desire.[11]

Girard also takes aim at Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher, who first used the word *logos* with its philosophical meaning of a rational principle that governs all things. Girard accepts Martin Heidegger's depiction of the Heraclitean logos as discordant with the logos hymned by the evangelist John in the opening passage of his gospel, but he flips Heidegger's Christophobic Grecophilia on its head to argue that the Heraclitean logos divinizes violence while the Johannine logos is the voice of the victim expelled by violence.[12] Girard's inverted Heideggerian reading of Heraclitus should be compared with Simone Weil's, for whom the truth of Heraclitus is found in a fragment of Cleanthes that describes how the logos rules through love, not violence.[13] But Girard chooses to follow Heidegger rather than Weil and the many other readers who discern a line of continuity between the Greek and Christian logoi.[14] Because Girard is so critical of philosophy and builds so much of his argument on literary texts, including the Bible, he might with some justification be accused of revising the "old quarrel between poetry and philosophy" that Socrates says was ancient even in his day.[15]

As Andreas Wilmes shows in his chapter in this book, Girard's attitude toward philosophy was far too nuanced to be characterized as simply hostile, but it is equally clear that he did not regard it as the royal road to the most important insights into the human condition. One indication of his determination to knock philosophy off its perch is his statement that "one must understand religion in order to understand philosophy. Since the

attempt to understand religion on the basis of philosophy has failed, we ought to try the reverse method and read philosophy in the light of religion."[16] Whereas philosophers have traditionally regarded their occupation as the autonomous exercise of reason, offering a life that is intrinsically desirable because it is the fulfillment of the highest human potential, Girard suggests that philosophy is unable even to understand itself, since the rationality on which it prides itself is darkened by the same constitutive blindness as the archaic religious worldview that it claims to have cast off, a blindness that can be healed only by the light of biblical revelation.

This attitude helps to explain why Girard never gave much sustained attention to the Western philosophical tradition, aside from several highly polemical essays on Nietzsche, whose belief in the uniqueness of Christianity he approvingly cites. In his writings, we find scattered references to other philosophers, including Plato, Heraclitus, Heidegger, and Derrida, but in almost every instance, with Nietzsche as the notable exception, he concludes that the philosopher's insights do not penetrate deep enough to uncover the real basis of social order in the resolution of mimetic conflict through scapegoating and sacrifice. As Paul Dumouchel reports in a recent interview, Girard reproached philosophy because he believed that "it remains at the conceptual level while he aims to make a work of empirical science speaking of the world as it is and as it has been. . . . In other words, he thinks that many philosophers tend to forget the world in favor of concepts or ideas."[17] And when not chiding philosophy for being incapable of a clear-sighted view of empirical reality, he sometimes accuses it of colluding in the cover up of society's violent origins, an allegation he directs specifically at Plato.

Girard's criticisms undoubtedly hit the mark when it comes to the blind spots of at least some philosophers, but there are many others in the Western tradition whose writings contain intimations—and maybe more than just intimations—of the same anthropological insights that he formalized in his mimetic theory, albeit expressed in a different idiom. After all, if his theory is correct, many of the "things hidden since the foundation of the world" have been ripe for discovery for quite some time. In fact, some of Girard's key ideas have a long philosophical pedigree, as several chapters in this book reveal. Plato speaks of *pleonexia* rather than "acquisitive desire," while Jean-Jacques Rousseau assigns the name *amour-*

propre to the phenomenon that Girard associates with metaphysical rivalry, but we should not let the differences in terminology blind us to the convergence in insight. And, just as Girard may be right to criticize at least some philosophers for becoming so enamored of the rarefied products of their own purportedly disinterested reason that they are unable to see—and in fact may help to obscure—the mimetic mechanisms that generate so much human desire, certain figures in the philosophical tradition might offer a corrective to what one could argue are Girard's own blind spots. So, for instance, when Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between *what we desire* and *what we have good reason to desire*, he affirms that there are some objects with the power to attract us because they really are objectively good, a possibility that Girard in several places explicitly denies.

All of that aside, a case can be made that the reason Girard is reluctant to speak too well of philosophy is not just that it is insufficiently empirical. Rather, it is because philosophy was born outside the ambit of biblical revelation. Girard's mimetic theory of human culture is, among other things, a defense of the traditional Christian belief that there are matters of vital importance to human beings that can be known only through divine revelation. For Girard, the content of the biblical revelation is not only ethical and soteriological but anthropological, a set of true insights into the violent origins of human culture that could never have been discovered by secular philosophy or unaided human reason, since the violent mechanisms that underlie culture are able to operate effectively only by continually dissimulating themselves. Philosophy is the product of a culture that is nourished by deceit. The same *méconnaissance* or misrecognition that engenders the war of mimetic rivals and the peace of the scapegoat is a built-in protection against its own discovery, precluding the possibility that human reason alone could unmask the foundations of the social order. The pre-Christian philosopher is thus a prisoner of the world that birthed him. If he believes that he can transcend the horizon of opinion that constricts the vision of his compatriots, he is deluded, since unaided reason can never gain the requisite distance to examine the foundations of one's own civilization. Girardian theologian Anthony Bartlett speaks for Girard when he insists that "the semiotic shift performed by the whole Bible is too radical to be produced by human intelligences internal to violent culture. It has to be molded by something beyond itself."[18] Once the hidden anthropological truth has been revealed, however, empirical reason can

verify what would have been impossible for it to discover on its own. Girard has adduced an impressive collection of evidence in support of his claim that these biblical insights are true. Yet, he insists, we are now able to deconstruct the myths that have always disguised the violent origins of human culture only because the biblical text has already done the heavy lifting for us.

Plato and the Greeks are the decisive test case. Whether they really were as blind as Girard claims can be decided only by a close, careful, and unbiased reading of their texts. So too, only careful reading can determine whether philosophers who came after the rise of Christianity anticipated some of Girard's most important insights, though without crediting them to the Bible as he does. This volume exists to explore these possibilities. We have invited a number of scholars with strong backgrounds in both mimetic theory and Western philosophy to contribute chapters that engage Girard in dialogue with some of the key figures in our philosophical tradition, from Plato to Kierkegaard. As the first book to situate Girard in relation to the Western philosophical tradition as a whole, it allows readers to trace the development of themes that are central to mimetic theory as they unfold over the course of the history of Western philosophy. In addition to demonstrating the value of mimetic theory for our reading of the history of Western philosophy, this book will enrich our appreciation of what is distinctive in Girard's contribution to the human sciences by highlighting the contributions of some of his greatest, if often overlooked, forerunners. Finally, we hope that this book will serve as a retort to Girard's sometimes injudicious dismissal of philosophy by showing how our philosophical tradition offers insights and conceptual resources that can enrich mimetic theory and make it an even more powerful tool of analysis.

NOTES

1. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvone Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 14.

2. Ibid., 300.

3. Ibid., 54.

4. Ibid., 61

5. Ibid., 92.

6. Ibid., 59.

7. René Girard, A *Theatre of Envy* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2004), 6.

8. For an in-depth discussion of Girard's account of the transition to modernity, see George A. Dunn, "The Collapsing Ladder of Degree: René Girard and Leo Strauss on the Origins of Modernity," in *A New Politics for Philosophy: Perspectives on Plato, Nietzsche, and Strauss* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2022).

9. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 8.

10. Ibid., 15.

11. See Sherwood Belangia's chapter in this book for an account of how viewing Plato as a dramatist rescues him from Girard's criticisms. In a later interview, Girard comes close to conceding this point. "In truth," he writes of Plato, "if you take a close look at his work . . . you notice that it is haunted by the true conflict born of imitated desires, the conflict between people who are close to each other, who desire the same thing, and who all of the sudden become rivals—the sort of conflict I talk about, and that I found in the work of novelists and playwrights—but"—and here we come up on what seems to the crux of the matter for Girard—"he doesn't conceptualize it" (René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer* [East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2014], 12). Of course, neither do Girard's novelists and playwrights!

12. In his discussion of the Heraclitean *logos*, which fills several pages, Girard not only offers no careful exegesis of any of the extant fragments of Heraclitus, but never even refers to explicit statements of Heraclitus about the *logos*. His entire argument rests on the authority of Heidegger.

13. Simone Weil, *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 138–39). Girard's affinity for Weil is reflected in his claim that she, just like himself, "held that even before presenting a 'theory of God,' a *theology*, the Gospels offer a 'theory of Man,' an *anthropology*." René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 44.

14. For example, Philo of Alexandria (the first century Jewish philosopher who was a major influence on the development of early Christian theology) and Justin Martyr (the second century Christian theologian) saw the Greek philosophers, including Heraclitus, as invaluable aids to the clarification of biblical teachings. In modern times, C. S. Lewis was a major proponent of the view that the extra-biblical religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions of the ancient world served as preparations for Christianity.

15. Plato, *Republic*, 607b.

16. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 15.

17. Paul Dumouchel and Andreas Wilmes, "René Girard and Philosophy: An Interview with Paul Dumouchel," *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, no. 1 (2017), http://dx.doi.org/10.22618/TP.PJCV.20171.1.95003.

18. Anthony Bartlett, *Signs of Change: The Bible's Evolution of Divine Nonviolence* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2022), 165.

Acknowledgments

THE EDITORS ARE IMMENSELY GRATEFUL TO WILLIAM A. JOHNSEN, series editor for the Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture series at Michigan State University Press, and to the rest of team at MSU Press for helping us to shepherd this project to completion. Of course, this book would not have been possible without the contributions of the many brilliant scholars whose thoughtful reflections are included in its pages. You are among the crème de la crème of philosophically oriented scholars of René Girard. It has been a privilege to work with you all. Among the contributors, we would especially like to acknowledge Sherwood Belangia, who played a vital role in helping to launch this project. Thanks are also due to Florina Haret for her outstanding translations of the chapters authored by Christine Orsini and Jean-Marc Bourdin. Finally, George Dunn would like to express his gratitude to Jimmy Kaltrieder and the Thiel Foundation for their financial support. Thank you, one and all!

Plato

Sherwood Belangia

THE HISTORY OF MIMETIC THEORY BEGINS WITH PLATO. HE SAW before other Western philosophers the promise and perils of mimetic desire. The modern founder of mimetic theory, René Girard, recognized Plato's preeminence in the field:

> Plato is unique in the history of philosophy because of his fear of mimesis, he is for the same reason closer than anyone to what is essential, closer than primitive religion itself.[1]

> Plato . . . revealed more about violence than all the others put together.[2]

Nearly all René Girard's books contain some reference to Plato. The two seminal mimetic theorists shared key themes, almost impossible to miss even on a cursory reading: the role of desire in shaping humanity and of mimesis in shaping desire; the power of mimesis to foment violence, including violent mobs; and the warping of perceived reality under the pressure of mimetic forces. Girard credited Plato with many insights into some of his pet themes: mirroring and monstrous doubles, violence caused by the loss of differentiation,[3] the mimetic basis of ritual,[4] and even the scapegoating mechanism itself: "There is an astonishing sentence in Plato, which still remains unexplained. One of the characters in the *Republic* says that if there existed a perfect man in whom there would be absolutely no evil, no vengeance, he would end up being killed. Socrates is close to being such a man. He criticizes cultural inequities; therefore, he designates himself as a scapegoat."[5] For both thinkers, mimesis "as both a force of

cohesion and a force of dissolution" is of primary anthropological importance—as is the need to transcend its pernicious effects.[6]

Indeed, René Girard thought that Plato's concern for the violence born of mimesis was an essential side of his work which interpreters have too often "confined . . . to his criticism of art." Plato's "understanding of the danger is essential, vital."[7] I believe *René Girard was fundamentally right in what is fundamental in Plato*: that mimesis should be placed at the center rather than the periphery of Plato's thought. A mimetic reading of Plato thus has great promise to tap into the vital spring of his thought.

Unfortunately, René Girard failed to provide such a reading. At best, he had an ambivalent relationship to Plato. His comments concerning Plato range from dismissive to highly critical. Not only so, but he believed Plato's failures prevented subsequent philosophy from understanding his mimetic discovery. Girard's summary dismissal of Plato inhibited him from seeing how right he was in discerning mimesis as the central theme of Plato's writing.

It is up to others then to write an *Achever Plato*. If we follow Girard in thinking that the Western philosophical tradition did not inherit Plato's insight into the importance of mimesis, perhaps only a mimetic reading of Plato can rescue philosophy from its blindness to the central fact of our humanity. As Seth Benardete claimed, "What philosophy is seems to be inseparable from the question of how to read Plato."[8]

This chapter is an effort toward a mimetic reading of Plato. It will focus on the *Republic* since that dialogue supplied all the prooftexts for Girard's critique of Plato.

What René Girard Missed in Plato

René Girard's criticisms of Plato largely reduce to two perceived faults that Girard believed had massive repercussions for all subsequent philosophy. The first is that Plato had "an irrational terror of mimesis" and sought to suppress it by sacrificial means.[9] The following quote is typical of this critique: "In the history of Western thought, Plato represents less a forgetting of being than a deliberate dissimulation of the violence that he saw at work in imitation. Imitation frightened him, and he had a very clear understanding of its relationship with religion, in other words, with

violence. He would have liked to perpetuate repression of that knowledge. For example, look at the fate he reserved for poets, those dangerous imitators."[10] The second chief defect of Plato on Girard's reading is the absence of acquisitive mimetic desire in his work: "Plato is deceived by mimesis because he cannot succeed in understanding his fear, he never uncovers its empirical reason for being. Plato never relates conflict to acquisitive mimesis, that is, with the object that the two mimetic rivals attempt to wrest from one another because they designate it as desirable to one another."[11] Let me first address the first of those criticisms. The second will be answered in subsequent sections.

On Censoring the Poets

As we noted earlier, Girard thought that Plato saw more clearly than others before or since the violent potential of mimesis. Per Girard, Plato's first fundamental error is a product of his fundamental discovery. He felt "terror" at his discovery, which Girard believed to be "a direct inheritance from the sacred."[12] Plato's response to this primitive terror was to try to suppress it through censorship, especially in the matter of religious violence. The poets must be banned, and the myths bowdlerized or proscribed altogether.

Support for this reading in the *Republic* is easy to find. Here is but one of many examples from the second book:

> First, telling the greatest falsehood about the most important things doesn't make a fine story —I mean Hesiod telling us about how Uranus behaved, how Cronus punished him for it, and how he was in turn punished by his own son. But even if it were true, it should be *passed over in silence*, not told to foolish young people. And if, for some reason, it has to be told, only a very few people—*pledged to secrecy* and after sacrificing not just a pig but something great and scarce—should hear it, so that their number is kept as small as possible. Yes, such stories are hard to deal with. And they *shouldn't be told* in our city, Adeimantus. Nor should a young person hear it said that in committing the worst crimes he's doing nothing out of the ordinary, or that if he inflicts every kind of punishment on an unjust father, he's only doing the same as the first and greatest of the gods. No, by god, I don't think myself that these stories are fit to be told.[13]

Girard comments on this passage:

> Plato, whom we were talking about, he's past that stage. He looks at the myth of Chronos, observes that all of the violence has been heaped on him, that he's been made into a kind of ogre, and he says: "We mustn't tell such abominable stories to little children; either it's a joke, and it should be completely forgotten, or else it's true, in which case it should be

> reserved for a very prudent elite able to understand these things; and, in the latter case, we'll take the precaution of covering ourselves with a major sacrifice, the sacrifice of a horse, for example." What is Plato doing? He's seeking to suppress the last traces of violence, but always by sacrificial means. . . . It's not the highlighting of truth, it's a new cover-up of violence by violence. The principle, the goal of philosophy, of humanism, is to hide the founding murder.[14]

Not only does Socrates call to suppress mimetic poetry throughout the second and third books, but reasserts and even adds to the arguments against mimetic poetry in the tenth book, the concluding book of the *Republic*:

> Our city has many features that assure me that we were entirely right in founding it as we did, and, when I say this, I'm especially thinking about poetry. (594b–595a)
>
> Like a painter, [the imitative poet] produces work that is inferior with respect to truth and appeals to a part of the soul that is similarly inferior rather than the best part. So we were right not to admit him into a city that is to be well-governed, for he arouses, nourishes, and strengthens this part of the soul and so destroys the rational one, in just the way that someone destroys the better sort of citizens when he strengthens the vicious ones and surrenders the city to them. Similarly, we'll say that an imitative poet puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual by making images that are far removed from the truth and gratifying the irrational part. (605a–c)

What could be clearer then? Plato is calling for the suppression of mimetic poetry, especially when the violence of the gods is on display, out of his fear of its corrupting potential. There are certainly passages in Plato that seem to lend support to this contention, and yet there are important points to keep in mind before we jump to any such conclusion.

In the first place, Plato in the *Republic* conceals neither the violence of the gods nor the suggestion that such depictions be prohibited in the imaginary city. On the contrary, he reveals depictions of violent gods to be falsifying myths. He does this in service to a nonviolent theology that deconstructs the myth of religious violence. And the mouthpiece of this theology is the vindicated victim, Socrates.

In the second place, Socrates suggests in the last book that the poetry should be allowed due process and "return from exile when it has successfully defended itself" (607d). He virtually begs his interlocutors to defend poetry: "Then we'll allow its defenders, who aren't poets themselves but lovers of poetry, to speak in prose on its behalf and to show that it not only gives pleasure but is beneficial both to constitutions and to human life. Indeed, we'll listen to them graciously, for we'd certainly profit if poetry

were shown to be not only pleasant but also beneficial" (607d–e). Although no explicit defense is offered in the text for the beneficent use of mimetic speech, let the *Republic* itself—a dramatic masterpiece and prime example of the very mimetic mode proscribed by Socrates—be admitted as evidence for the defense!

In the third place, we must remember that the city-in-speech is an ad hoc device that Socrates employs to aid in the search for justice in the soul. Everything asserted in the political context must therefore be read in two registers: city and soul. Certain questions should arise after every political assertion about the implication at the level of soul. How does the theme of censorship at the political level apply to the "guardianship of the soul?" Isn't removing ourselves from malign mimetic influences a reasonable first solution to the problem? Reflecting on my own case, some media outlets trigger angry feelings that reinforce my existing political biases. I try to avoid those since they inhibit me from questioning them. In this, my critical judgment is *censoring* influences that affect the passionate side of my nature. Maybe Plato had something like that in mind?

In the fourth place, these calls to censorship are in the context of a fictional conversation between certain characters named Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus. The conversation has a dramatic context and is informed by the perspectival limitations of Plato's characters. At no time does Plato emerge from behind the curtain and issue proclamations. The *Republic* is not a treatise, but a drama with many narrative levels: (1) the level of the arguments themselves; (2) the dramatic level of the people conversing (or silently listening) within the house of Cephalus at the time of the feast of Bendis; (3) the first-person narration of Socrates,[15] who is also a participant in what he narrates and who is notorious for his inconsistency, sometimes bad arguments, and irony; (4) the situation of the "audience" to whom the dialogue is read. These multiple semantic levels of meaning tend to undermine any univocal reading of what Plato intended. Sometimes these levels reinforce each other, but often they are at cross-purposes.

Understanding the context of Plato's audience is important. The narrative setting of the dialogue is a time before significant events in the history of Athens, and yet written afterward to people aware of those events and of the fates of the dramatis personae. Socrates, as we all know, was silenced by the city in 399 BC for speech deemed dangerous to the cultic order. Both Glaucon and Adeimantus were brothers of Plato and were most

likely supporters and participants in the Critias-led reign of the Thirty Tyrants. The leaders of that oligarchy, Critias and Charmides (also of Plato's family), died in a battle fought in the exact spot by the Piraeus walls where the dialogue opens—surely no coincidence. The oligarchs came to power as self-professed "purifiers" of the civic order (like the guardians of Callipolis?), but by the end of their brutal fourteen-month reign, more of their fellow citizens died than during the entire Peloponnesian War. Among the heinous deeds of the Critian oligarchy was the murder of their critics—the most brutal form of censorship imaginable. The fact that a reasoned defense of censorship finds the approval of Glaucon, a supporter of the family-led coup, ought to make us suspicious of similar rationalizations each of us might have when defending our political opinions. The fact that the proposal is made by a victim murdered by proponents of cultic purity ought to make us doubly suspicious.[16]

In the fifth place, finally, we should note that Plato is as much an ironist as his mentor Socrates. It is ironic that Plato practices the same form of writing that is forbidden by the arguments made in the dialogue. So why does he make them? There is a clue at the beginning of the second book. Socrates had just "defeated" Thrasymachus's argument that injustice is preferable to justice. Glaucon and Adeimantus however are not satisfied. Even though they believe Socrates's contention that the just life is preferable to the unjust, they marshal powerful arguments in defense of the opposite conclusion. Mere belief is not enough for them. Significantly, they do this without any prodding from Socrates. As Adeimantus says to Socrates: "Others would satisfy me if they praised justice and blamed injustice in that way, extolling the wages of one and denigrating that of the other. But you, unless you order me to be satisfied, wouldn't, for you spent your whole life investigating this and nothing else. Don't, then, give us only a theoretical argument that justice is stronger than injustice, but show what effect each has because of itself on the person who has it—the one for good and the other for bad—whether it remains hidden to the gods and human beings or not" (367d–e).

The brothers, in notable mimesis of Socrates, seem to say to him, "you wouldn't be satisfied without completing the argument in favor of justice, despite our belief, so don't assume we should be satisfied as long as strong counterarguments stand unrefuted." Socrates responds to their dissatisfaction this way: "While I'd always admired the natures of Glaucon

and Adeimantus, I was especially pleased on this occasion, and I said: You are the sons of a great man . . . for you must indeed be affected by the divine if you're not convinced that injustice is greater than justice and yet can speak on its behalf as you do" (367e–368a). What Socrates admires, I think, is that the brothers have not passively followed the arguments made by Socrates. They are no longer just pliant interlocutors led by another person's influence, however prestigious, to believe or doubt certain things. They resist the mimetic reinforcement of self-satisfied confidence they may see in others. A conclusion accepted by others at the end of an argument may or may not be true. The brothers unsettle things by voicing their own qualms. *Republic* moves to a new level as a result. Interpreters of Plato have long noted that the first book looks just like a self-contained aporetic dialogue—a Thrasymachus dialogue similar to other aporetic dialogues like *Laches* or *Charmides*. Narratively at least, *Republic* exists as we know it because of the brothers' courage in voicing their qualms.

I had mentioned four levels or frames or meaning in *Republic*. Let me now introduce a fifth: the argument carried on in the souls of its readers. Much like what Socrates applauded in the brothers, Plato doesn't want us to accept any argument uncritically. He leaves provocations within his text begging us to take another look—just as we noted in Socrates's call for a defense of poetry—and to follow our own misgivings into new paths of argument, wherever that may lead. The dialogues should imbue us with a sense of the seriousness of the questions asked, to *enact* the argument within ourselves, and help us resist the *mimetic* appeal of the characters' acceptance of inadequate answers. As William Altman puts it: "Only when students can spot and reject a deliberately created falsehood masquerading as the teacher's authoritative statement have they internalized the truth."[17] Ruby Blondell makes a similar point: "Paradoxically, the very acquiescence of Glaucon and Adeimantus is a stimulus to the reader to progress beyond them. Even their most wooden responses invite resistance, to leave us space to question what they unhesitatingly accept. . . . The purposely provocative nature of [Socrates's] ideas stimulates the reader to disagree and argue."[18]

René Girard is then right to reject the censorship he finds in Plato's *Republic*, but wrong to accuse Plato of advocating it. Plato and Girard agree that mimesis is a serious matter—to which censorship stands as a provocation, a marker both for the seriousness of the mimetic danger and for the threat of violent attempts to control it. (Girard too exhibits fear when

writing of the terrifying potential of mimesis.) I believe Girard was close to the right idea when he wrote: "Plato, in spite of himself, revealed more about violence than all the others put together. And in uncritically taking Plato at his word when he argues against poetry, one fails to grasp the repudiation of violence that this implied."[19] Had Girard carried out in his interpretation of Plato this "implied repudiation," he would have found an ally in the battle against mimetic violence.

What Girard mostly overlooked is that Plato is a dramatist like Shakespeare, a novelist like Dostoevsky or Proust, although he seemed at least once to have had this realization: "In truth, if you take a close look at [Plato's] work, *The Republic* in particular, you notice that it's haunted by the true conflict born of imitated desires, the conflict between people who are close to each other, who desire the same thing, and who all of a sudden become rivals—the sort of conflict I talk about, and that I found in the work of novelists and playwrights—but he doesn't conceptualize it."[20] Despite this insight, nowhere in Girard's published work do we find him making use of it. Had he done so, he could have added his voice to a growing legion of Plato scholars who understand that one cannot understand the import of the arguments made in the dialogues without also considering their dramatic contexts.[21]

Acquisitive Desire in Book I of the *Republic*

The problem of desire is thematic at the beginning of the *Republic*. Early in the first book, Socrates asks Cephalus, the aged foreigner whose home in Piraeus provides the setting of the dialogue, whether old age is hard. This question sets in motion the conversation that provides the substance of the *Republic*. In his response to Socrates, the elderly host introduces the topic of desire. Speaking of his aged peer group, Cephalus says: "When they meet, most of the members of our group lament, longing for the pleasures of youth and reminiscing about sex, about drunken bouts and feasts and all that goes with things of that sort; they take it hard as though they were deprived of something very important and had then lived well but are now not even alive" (329a). But Cephalus thinks that the loss of carnal appetite is a blessing, who after quoting Sophocles ("most joyfully did I escape it, as though I had run away from a sort of frenzied and savage master") writes, "In every way, old age brings great peace and freedom from such things.

When the desires cease to strain and finally relax, then what Sophocles says comes to pass in every way; it is possible to be rid of very many mad masters" (329c).

There are a few things to notice here. First, mimetic desire lingers even without the support of carnal urges and so cannot be reduced to appetite. The unsatisfied and unsatisfiable desires of the aged friends haunt them like phantom limbs. If old age releases one from the burden of sexual appetite, what accounts for the lament of Cephalus's friends? Mustn't all second order desire—i.e., the desire for a desire—be mimetic in origin? Second, in asserting that strong desires can be "mad masters," acting against one's best interest, Cephalus suggests that life is better without them. Socrates shows respect to Cephalus, but dramatically Plato signals that passionlessness cannot serve as a remedy for mimetic desire. The scene is laced with death imagery, an allusive agreement with the friends' opinion that loss of desire is as loss of life. Cephalus (the "head") is quickly whisked off the stage, not to return; his son Polemarchus ("war-ruler") assumes his mantle. Plato thereby insinuates that a person without passion has little to contribute to a discussion of the good life.

The examination of justice resumes with Polemarchus defining it as "doing good to friends and harm to enemies" (332d). Notice that this conventional definition of justice is strictly reciprocal. Polemarchus's tit-for-tat conception of justice is a catalyst for mimetic doubling. Socrates makes two critical moves, important when we think about how he would deal with mimetic desire. First, Socrates leads Polemarchus to reflect on whether someone could mistake friend for foe or enemy for friend. Since such a mistake is possible, there is an implied need for critical reflection before one can enact justice. Without a critical pause, the worst effects of reciprocity (e.g., harming a friend) are in danger of becoming active on the least (mistaken) provocation. Second, Socrates shows Polemarchus that justice can only be a benefit, since the application of "true" justice makes its recipient more, not less, just. On Socrates's reckoning, true justice is only selectively reciprocal, since it reciprocates benefits but not harms. Justice must be self-reflective to make this discrimination. Socrates's questioning has undermined three implications of the conventional understanding of justice—that it is reciprocal, unreflective, and potentially violent. Not coincidentally, each is a prominent feature of mimetic rivalry.

The entry of Thrasymachus into the conversation is the climax of the first book. Without warning, Socrates is verbally attacked by the scandalized sophist, but Socrates doesn't return the attack. Instead, he enacts the purified conception of justice revealed in his dialogue with Polemarchus—that it is never just to harm another. Socrates's response is *non-reciprocal*: he does not mirror Thrasymachus's aggression or escalation to extremes; *non-rivalrous*: he aims not at defeat of his opponent but rather shared possession of the truth about justice; and *benevolent*: he responds to Thrasymachus's enmity by seeking to help/heal him with his dialectical art. Considerations of brevity prevent me from exploring all the mimetic features of this fascinating exchange, but I want to highlight a few. First, notice how differently Thrasymachus and Socrates account for what is at stake in their dialogue/debate:

> **THRASYMACHUS**: You won't get away with doing harm unnoticed and, failing to get away unnoticed, you won't be able to overpower me in the argument. (341 a–b)
>
> **SOCRATES**: Thrasymachus, you daimonic man, do you toss in such an argument, and have it in mind to go away before teaching us adequately before finding out whether it is so or not? Or do you suppose you were trying to determine a small matter and not a course of life on the basis of which each of us would have the most profitable existence? (344d–e)

Both seek "advantage"—a key term in Thrasymachus's definition of justice, the "advantage of the stronger."[22] Thrasymachus understands advantage to mean "overpowering the other to prevent being overpowered," whereas Socrates seeks the mutual advantage of determining together the "most profitable existence." Thrasymachus is imitating what he interprets as Socrates's desire for victory in the debate and the social prestige that would follow it; Socrates is imitating Thrasymachus's desire to articulate and live the best form of life. Let me underline an extremely important point: there is imitation in both instances. Mimesis can be either vicious or virtuous depending on one's interpretational posture. This "posture" is related to the chief interest of the dialogue: the role of justice in the good life. The dramatic context and conversational theme are perfectly coincident here. An unjust disposition leads Thrasymachus into mimetic conflict and escalation, whereas the just disposition of Socrates induces reciprocal effort toward achieving what's good for both parties.

A second highlight in the Thrasymachus/Socrates conversation centers on the scandal of advantage. Socrates asks a series of questions about who among the just and unjust would desire to "get the better" of the other:

would an unjust person desire to "get the better" of a just person? How about over another unjust person? Will the just person desire to "get the better" of another just person or simply an unjust one? (349b–350b). The answer is that an unjust person would desire to "get the better" of both the just and the unjust indiscriminately, whereas a just person would seek to "get the better" of only the unjust (350b). This is reciprocal or nonreciprocal depending on one's point of view. The Greek verb that Allan Bloom translates here as "to get the better of" is *pleonektein*. Other variants in Liddell-Scott include *to out-do*; *to claim more that one's share*; *to be greedy, grasping, arrogant*.[23] The substantive form is *pleonexia*, which means something like "over-reaching acquisitiveness at the expense of others." Translated into the language of mimetic theory, *pleonexia* is acquisitive desire, the root of violence and disorder in both Plato and Girard.

It should be mentioned that Girard not only missed the prominent place of acquisitive desire in Plato's thought but also attacked Plato for its supposed omission, as we have seen. Clearly, Plato understood the dynamics of acquisitive mimesis (*pleonexia*) quite well, and the entire *Republic* is a sustained inquiry into its pathologies. A careful reading of the dialogue will reveal *pleonexia* to be the opposite of justice and the very disease justice seeks to cure. In the fourth book, justice (*dikaiosyne*) is defined as "the minding one's own business and not being a busy-body" (433a). Justice is set against an inordinate interest in one's neighbor's business. Such an interest is certainly mimetic in origin. The problem of the *Republic's* educational scheme is finding a way to cultivate justice amid mimetic temptations to *pleonexia*.

What is astonishing in Plato is that his recognition that desire and mimesis are the cause of a host of violent pathologies, and yet, are inalienable ingredients in a well-lived life. Plato is a useful supplement to mimetic theory due to his wide-ranging exploration of mimetic *disorder* and his tenacious pursuit of non-sacrificial forms of mimetic *order*. Girard left a few hints in his early work to outline what a "cure" for mimetic disease must look like, an outline which aligns with Plato's prescriptions. First, there is the necessity of repentance, conversion, and vertical transcendence

for overcoming mimetic disorder. Second, humans cannot leave behind their essential mimeticism, that the cure for mimesis is always mimetic too.

Once we notice that the diagnosis and therapy of disordered desire is at the core of Plato's *Republic*, the logic behind its educational program can be discerned. Socrates narrates an *education of desire* that seeks to unveil (1) the mimetic origin of desire, (2) the frustrations of the double-bind, and (3) the inherent nonbeing and undesirability of mimetically generated social objects. This ascetical ground-clearing prepares the student/patient to choose a different type of mediation and to discover different types of objects as a means to a transformed type of relationship. This transformed relationship has a name. He calls it *dikaiosune*, a.k.a. justice.

Social Stratification and Mimetic Desire

The *Republic's* educational program is part of a larger quest to understand the nature of justice. Socrates proposes that he and his interlocutors "build a city in speech" in order to make justice easier to discover by being "writ large."[24] The first version, "the primitive city," is devoted only to the satisfaction of limited survival needs. But Glaucon objects to this austerity and calls the result a "city of pigs." He demands "relishes"—a metonym, I would argue, for any desire that exceeds bare need. Superfluous, mimetic desires are given free rein in this thought experiment. Socrates characterizes the resultant city as "feverish" and, like a skilled doctor, begins taking the patient's history. The features of this second iteration of the city-in-speech (a.k.a. the "feverish" or "luxurious city") should be familiar to students of Girard: mimeticism, acquisitive desire, manufactured scarcities, and conflicting desires that lead to violence. Inordinate desires butt up against the desires of others similarly disposed. Each actor tries to acquire more than the other, and social energies are diverted from production to predation and defense. Each wants to seize their neighbor's/other's land, finding that their own "will now be smaller although it was once enough" (373d). The perverse alchemy of mimetic desire turns sufficiency into lack. Socrates makes clear how "unlimited acquisition . . . overstepping the boundary of the necessary" leads to "war as a consequence" (373d–e). Socrates then says that "we have now found the origins of war. It comes from those same

desires that are most of all responsible for the bad things that happened to cities and the individuals in them" (373d–e).

The threat of violence unleashed by inordinate desire (*epithumia*) leads the city to appoint people of competitive spirit (*thumos*) to serve as guardians, as loyal defenders of tribal values. These two words—*thumos* and *epithumia*—are so important to the mimetic interpretation of Plato that I need to discuss them in more detail.[25] *Thumos* is competitive desire for social goods like honor, victory, prestige, fame, status, and supremacy over others. It delights in competitive contexts, is sensitive to honor and shame, and is quick to pick a fight—one of its many English equivalents is "anger" as a result of this tendency. Whereas *thumos* desires social goods, *epithumia* is inordinate craving for appetitive goods like food, drink, sex, creature-comforts, and, in service of these ends, money. While *epithumia* can denote "desire" simply, it connotes "craving" or "lust," because mimesis tends to drive it to the extremes of *pleonexia*.[26] Thus Plato bifurcates mimetic desire into two species, *epithumia* and *thumos*, distinguished by their objects: appetitive goods and social goods, respectively. This dichotomy is the basis of social stratification: the city sets the *thumos* of the guardians over the *epithumia* of the masses.

Thumos provides the basis for a status-obsessed culture that keeps scornful watch over *epithumia*. Similarly, in the soul equipped with rightly disposed *thumos*, concern for social standing makes one ashamed of pursuing a profligate life. *Thumos* disparages excessive devotion to appetitive goods. It considers mastery over such base pleasures to be a badge of honor. But *thumos* has a dark side, which students of mimetic theory will easily recognize: its honor is easily offended and prone to escalate rivalry to the point of violence. Tokens and places of preeminence, always mimetic in origin, are scarce and likely to attract multiple claimants, also inciting violence. Even the goods desired by *epithumia*—food, sex, creature comforts, and money—can turn into objects of rivalry for *thumos* when they become markers of status or honor, i.e., when they become trophies in a competitive struggle. (Think Agamemnon and Achilles fighting over Briseis.) So *thumos* can also fall into the kind of *pleonexia* it was assigned to overcome. And it can devolve into an even worse form of *pleonexia* since it amplifies and escalates a desire for inherently scarce social goods that rely on a supply of worthy antagonists to achieve value.

The *Republic's* educational program arises out of the need to keep the savagery of the guardian's *thumos* from becoming *pleonexic* in this way and erupting into factional conflict (*stasis*). As Juvenal put the problem: "*Quis cusdodiet ispsos custodes*?"—"Who will guard the guardians themselves?"[27] Plato does not fantasize that the city must rid itself of those most prone to mimetic conflict. On the contrary, the *thumoeidetic* guardians are to be educated not banished.[28] Unlike *epithumia*, which is devoted to selfish appetite, *thumos* has a capacity for selfless obedience to the values of the society in which it finds itself. Honor is a mimetic object and a politically valuable one. The mimetic impulses must be purified through education, not eliminated. The natural desire of *thumos* to excel will be leveraged to reach something even more socially beneficial. The problem is not *thumos* broadly, but *thumos* that succumbs to *pleonexia*, i.e., acquisitive desire, the craving to possess more than one's share of material or social goods at the expense of the other. Education in the *Republic* is an inoculation against the disease of *pleonexia*. The educational program has three main stages: (1) training in music and gymnastics to both excite and discipline *thumos*, (2) mathematical studies in service of the rational part (*logistikon*) of the soul, and (3) training in dialectic.

Music and Gymnastics

Primary education begins with "music," a term meaning more than rhythmic sounds produced by instruments and voices. *Mousike* refers to any mimetic and metrical medium, including poetry, theater, dance, literature, and history. Music was the prime bearer of cultural memory in service to the mother Muse, Mnemosyne. Greece had been a predominantly oral culture only decades before Socrates. Indeed, Eric Havelock sees Plato as part of the vanguard of literacy's struggle to supplant orality.[29] Metrical forms are highly mimetic: a cultural heritage infuses music into the sinews and bones of its people. Socrates claims that "never are the ways of music moved without the greatest political laws being moved" (424c). The mimetic tenacity of music is both a strength and weakness. As a preserver of right opinions and salutary norms it is a very good thing. But it also tends to hold the unreflective norms of archaic (i.e., sacrificial) societies. Music confers a semblance of truth and rightness (*doxa*) that may be wrong upon reflection, but it crowds out that very reflection. This accounts perhaps for

its tenacity and usefulness as a medium of cultural transmission. Music "educates through habits, transmitting by harmony a certain harmoniousness, not knowledge, and by rhythm a certain rhythmicalness. And connected with it were certain other habits, akin to these, conveyed by speeches, whether they were tales or speeches of a truer sort" (522a).[30]

Unreflective mimesis is present from the very beginning of human development, whereas a self-reflective, critical consciousness is an achievement hard of attainment, the mature fruit of a mature culture. This is true in both the phylogenesis of human society and the ontogenesis of a developing individual. Culture is absorbed by the young before they can critically engage it. And yet they *must* be given the cultural inheritance before they can develop a critical faculty. As Girard says in an interview: "The new can only emerge within a tradition. You can't subvert tradition except from within."[31] Therefore, a cultivated ethos and the habits of subjectivity that sustain it—"heritage taken as task" to paraphrase Goethe—is preparatory to an accomplished self-transcending objectivity. But because the delivery mechanism is mimesis—Plato thinks that it is easy for a society to botch this stage: "The young can't distinguish what is allegorical from what isn't, and the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become inalterable. For these reasons, then, we should probably take the utmost care to ensure that the first stories they hear about virtue are the best ones for them to hear" (378d–e). What worries Socrates is that such stories contain implicit norms, received without reflection, and are transmitted mimetically:[32] "Indeed, if we want the guardians of our city to think that it's shameful to be easily provoked into hating each other, we mustn't allow any stories about the gods warring, fighting, or plotting against one another, for they aren't true. The battles of gods and giants, and all the various stories of the gods eating their families or friends, shouldn't either be told nor even woven in embroideries" (378b–c).

Violence, as in this instance, has a scandalous attraction. Its images remain strongly rooted in memory and create strong somatic effects. The body doesn't distinguish between image and reality—amygdala, heart, and viscera all prepare to fight. The spirit becomes excited with fantasies of aggressive supremacy. This lays down a habit in the soul that functions as a norm—i.e., one must counter offense with aggression—just waiting for a provocation to initiate a mimetic cycle of violence and counter-violence. That the mimetic modes are external mediators par excellence—gods and

heroes—doesn't mitigate the dangers. Whether one person internally mediates for another the acquisitive desire for a common object, or an external mediator excites desire for a common object in two people close enough to fight, the result is the same: violence.

The purified musical education proposed by Socrates is intended to moderate or sooth the *thumos* of the guardians—not to weaken but to channel it into salutary directions. Gymnastics, on the other hand, aims to excite the *thumos*, make it stronger, increase passion. Struggling against resistance in pursuit of recognized achievement motivates a person of high *thumos*. The student will "undergo these exercises and labors looking less to strength than to the spirited part of his nature and for the purpose of arousing it" (410b). Competitive desire (*thumos*) is a potency that needs discipline *and* amplification. Competition is a mutually reinforcing zeal that drives strenuous effort in pursuit of something difficult of attainment. Such thumotic zeal also turns out to be a motiving force of the later stages of mathematical education and philosophical dialectic. Gymnastics is thus propaedeutic to these later stages of mimetically reinforced effort in pursuit of higher ideals. As Sarah Broadie writes:

> We love, value or admire the qualities that are tested by the competition and which provide the criteria for victory. Making these qualities the focus of an on-going competitive habit or culture is a way of celebrating the qualities for their own sake; and at the same time, through the competitive raising of standards, it is a way—also for those qualities' own sake—to generate in the world more perfect instances of them. Thus the type of rivalry that generates pure winners tends to be part of a larger activity which, in addition to satisfying the human desire for competition and victory, is dedicated to cultivating for their own sake the qualities in which winners excel.[33]

Perhaps Plato describes a musical and gymnastic education to help us ponder what enables or prevents a healthy mimetic constitution. The only escape from pernicious mimesis is though mimesis, as Plato seems to recognize in these passages. This seems to be a superior understanding than modernity's blind indifference to such matters.

Mathematics and Moderation

In the fourth book, Socrates enumerates three parts (or faculties) of the soul. Two we have touched on: the faculties dealing with *epithumia* and *thumos*. The third is *logistikon*, sometimes translated as the "rational part" of the

soul, but is more precisely concerned with comparisons, calculation, and ratios. (*Logos*, the root of *logistikon*, means among other things, "ratio.") *Logistikon* abstracts from the relativity of conflicting appearance and submits them to the discipline of ratio and measure. Music and gymnastics prepare *thumos* to rule over *epithumia*, but the soul still needs a critical faculty in order to see through the deceptions of *doxa*, i.e., opinion. Under the sway of mimesis, things *seem* more valuable, more important, more desirable than they really are. As Girard notes: "The value of an object grows in proportion to the resistance met with in acquiring it. And the value of the model grows as the objects value grows. Even if the model has no particular prestige at the outset, even if all that 'prestige' implies—*praestigia*, spells and phantasmagoria—is quite unknown to the subject, the very rivalry will be enough to bring prestige into being."[34]

Mimetic desires tend to abandon measure and limit. The comparative and superlative properties that the objects *seem* to possess are products of mimetic desire. Our mimetic nature with its tendency to escalate must learn to submit to measure and proportion, to the rational faculty, i.e., *logistikon*. An abiding concern in the *Republic* is that political passions are perverted by partisan *thumos* toward *pleonexia*, i.e., an "I-win-you-lose" dynamic. The ends of good governance become lost in the heat of rivalry: a steady stream of "losers" must be sacrificed to prop up the conceit of the "winners." This dynamic tends toward immoderation—the escalation to extremes and monstrous doubles. An excessive interest in partisan melodrama obscures the true end of politics: the common good and participation in its benefits. So, Plato sees value in logistic, which studies ratio and measure. The logistical arts are touchstones immune from the vagaries of mimetic deception.

Logistical studies are hard. They test a student's capacity for disciplined striving, for tenacity in the face of resistance, in service to an object that emerges only after long struggle. The student can pass the test only by means of a desire that is energetic enough to endure rigor, but without the zeal of partisan conflict to sustain it. The student must learn to be competitive in a type of "game" that has no losers and no trophies to win, and yet with the same sort of zealous pursuit of the high and difficult we mentioned in our discussion of gymnastics. The student learns to see that her inspiring master is not an obstacle, but an ally in overcoming the difficulties inherent in rigorous study. The master and student are com-

petitors in the etymological sense of "seekers in common." Student and master become advantageous (i.e., *sumpheroi*) to one other by sustaining desire and joint attention. The model/obstacle nexus is severed because the resistance comes from the object's difficulty, not the model's opposition. *Logistikon* is thus a fitting preparation for the capstone discipline: dialectic.

Dialectic, Conversion, and Philosophical Friendship

At the beginning of the seventh book, Socrates produces an image to illustrate the human condition:

> Compare the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature to an experience like this: Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up, which is both open to the light and as wide as the cave itself. They've been there since childhood, fixed in the same place, with their necks and legs fettered, able to see only in front of them, because their bonds prevent them from turning their heads around. Light is provided by a fire burning far above and behind them. Also behind them, but on higher ground, there is a path stretching between them and the fire. Imagine that along this path a low wall has been built, like the screen in front of puppeteers above which they show their puppets. I'm imagining it. Then also imagine that there are people along the wall, carrying all kinds of artifacts that project above it . . . The prisoners would in every way believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts. (514a–c)

In this allegory, the prisoners mistake shadows for reality. The puppeteers are like many of the mimetic forces that shape our desires and sense of value and importance: bloggers, podcasters, television programmers, purveyors of fashion, advertising agencies, campaign managers, politicians, social media influencers, etc. They maintain the prisoners' ignorance by providing them with a "shadow world" that keeps them distracted and complacent. The prisoners entertain themselves with competitive games to predict their patterns.

The image of puppeteers doesn't quite capture the full range of mimetic forces in our lives, most important of which are the people around us, the ones close enough to us to serve as both models and obstacles. Plato tends to focus on bad effects of certain types of *external* mediators, whereas Girard is more concerned with the *internal* mediators in our own social circles. And yet their vision of our predicament is strikingly similar. Consider his description of Combray from Proust's novel: "Combray is a closed universe. In it the child lives in the shadow of his parents and the family idols with the same happy intimacy as the medieval village in the

shadow of the belfry. Combray's unity is primarily spiritual rather than physical. Combray is the vision shared by all the members of the family. A certain order is superimposed on reality and becomes indistinguishable from it. The first symbol of Combray is the magic lantern whose images take on the shape of the objects on which they are projected and are returned in the same way to us by the wall of the room, the lamp, shades, and the doorknobs."[35]

In Plato's allegory, one prisoner is eventually freed and dragged out of the cave into the sunlight. As his eyes adjust, he discovers the "world of real things" and eventually realizes the puppeteers' deception. But this transition is far from easy:

> When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look up toward the light, he'd be pained and dazzled and unable to see the things whose shadows he'd seen before . . . [if] we pointed to each of the things passing by, asked him what each of them is, and compelled him to answer, don't you think he'd be at a loss and that he'd believe that the things he saw earlier were truer than the ones he was now being shown? Much truer. And if someone compelled him to look at the light itself, wouldn't his eyes hurt, and wouldn't he turn around and flee toward the things he's able to see, believing that they're really clearer than the ones he's being shown? (514c–e)

Similarly, here is Girard again on the shadow world of Combray: "Combray shies away from dangerous truths as a healthy organism refuses to digest something which would harm it. Combray is an eye which blinks out the particles of dust which might irritate. Everyone at Combray is therefore his own censor; but this self-censorship, far from being painful, blends with the peace of Combray, with the happiness of being a part of Combray."[36] I believe these visions are aligned because Plato and Girard are discussing different branches of the same root. For both, mimesis places us in a world of illusions and shadows, from which rescue can only happen through conversion. Plato asserts: "Education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this *turning around*, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. It isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately" (518d).

Dialectic, which is the summit of Socratic education, works through disillusionment, which turns out to be the same thing as conversion, seen from the opposite side of the redemptive event. There is a (hypothetical?)

transition from the pain of loss to the felicity of enjoyed reality. Girard puts it this way: "Every level of his existence is inverted, all the effects of metaphysical desire are replaced by contrary effects. Deception gives way to truth, anguish to remembrance, agitation to repose, hatred to love, humiliation to humility, mediated desire to autonomy, deviated transcendency to vertical transcendency."[37] And "True desire brings into being a certain relationship to others and to oneself."[38]

The experience of the illusory world of mimesis after a conversion experience, as illustrated with the descent back into the cave, shows a loss of interest in the goods that incite conflict and rivalry:

> What about when he reminds himself of his first dwelling place, his fellow prisoners, and what passed for wisdom there? Don't you think that he'd count himself happy for the change and pity the others? Certainly. And if there had been any honors, praises, or prizes among them for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows as they passed by and who best remembered which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously, and who could thus best divine the future, do you think that our man would desire these rewards or envy those among the prisoners who were honored and held power? (516c–d)

This is release from mimetic bondage, but not as some sort of romantic autonomy unaffected by mimesis. Human beings cannot stand outside of mimesis: "A man who has his understanding truly turned toward the things that are, has no desire to look down toward the affairs of human beings and to be filled with envy and ill will as a result of fighting with them. But, rather, because he sees and contemplates things that . . . are always in the same condition . . . he *imitates* them and, as much as possible, makes himself like them" (500b–c; my emphasis).

Let's be honest though. Plato's vision can be read as aristocratic aloofness from the vulgar crowd and their petty concerns. Plato was clearly an elitist when it came to education and thought a true dialectical education was only available to a few. The criticism that the dialogue's proposals are only for a rarified elite is legitimate. The educational program described in the *Republic* is offered only to the guardian class. But again, it is up to us to admit the defect and attempt to complete the argument in order to best understand its teaching. Perhaps we shouldn't take the educational plan too literally. We need to understand for ourselves the questions and concerns that give rise to the particular configuration of answers we find in the *Republic*. We can redeem what lives and discard the rest.

If there is a single animating concern in the dialogues, it is the distinction between a real good and an apparent good. Wisdom for Plato is understanding that distinction, along with the discipline to overcome the seductions of the merely apparent. A real good is always more choice-worthy than an apparent (but false) good, and yet people consistently err in choosing the latter over the former, a choice contrary to their own best interests. Why do our passions lead us to battle each other for apparent goods? Why do we prefer romantic lies to novelistic truth? Why do we resist having our untruth exposed? The answer that both Girard and Plato give is the corruption of desire by mimesis.

Opinion is intimately related to desire, and thus mimesis. In the first place, every opinion is the premature satisfaction of the desire to know. In the second place, every desire harbors an implicit opinion concerning what is desirable and good. The shadows on the cave are therefore byproducts of desire, which are shaped by and shape our notions of the good.

Satisfaction with the merely apparent can cause great harm. Sham experts, perhaps represented by the puppeteers, only exacerbate the problem. Socrates's interrogation of purported experts throughout the dialogues shows how this self-satisfaction, the snobbery of elite status born of metaphysical desire, is deceptive and not self-authenticating. "Expertise" is exposed as a pose, an imitation of the audience's expectations of what an expert ought to look like. It is thus "three steps removed from the truth." Plato's contempt for the pretense of wisdom is evident in the constant attacks on sophistry. The sophist turns out to be a bullshit artist who "educates" others not out of genuine wisdom but in imitation of the appearance of wisdom. The danger of this mimesis of wisdom is the corruption of the capacity to choose the real over the apparent. This is a problem for everyone, not just elites.

Conclusion

At the very end of the *Republic*, Socrates relates another parable. A certain man named Er, from Pamphylia, ("all tribes") dies in battle but miraculously returns to life after twelve days, during which he witnesses the afterlife and the judgment of souls. The three Fates preside, one of whom, Lachesis, gives instructions to the newly arrived souls: "Your daimon or

guardian spirit will not be assigned to you by lot; you will choose him. The one who has the first lot will be the first to choose a life to which he will then be bound by necessity. Virtue knows no master; each will possess it to a greater or less degree, depending on whether he values or disdains it. The responsibility lies with the one who makes the choice; the god has none" (617d–e). The dead souls take turns selecting new lives on the basis of their experiences on earth. For example, the soul of Orpheus, who had a tragic love story in his previous life, chooses the life of a swan, avoiding the life of a human out of his aversion to the female sex due to his sufferings (620c–621b). Another soul that had previously lived a modest life chooses a life of power and tyranny, based on an unfulfilled desire for power during its previous existence (619d). Ajax, who had harbored a grudge against Odysseus, chose the life of a lion, believing it to be a fierce and noble existence. In every example, there is the hint of bad mimesis haunting those experiences, and the criteria they choose have been thereby corrupted.

The most instructive choice is made by Odysseus: "Now, it chanced that the soul of Odysseus got to make its choice last of all, and since memory of its former sufferings had relieved its love of honor, it went around for a long time, looking for the life of a private individual who did his own work, and with difficulty it found one lying off somewhere neglected by the others. He chose it gladly and said that he'd have made the same choice even if he'd been first" (620c). Odysseus picked last, after others had removed themselves as mimetic influences. Socrates hints that he chose best. The most choice-worthy life in this story is precisely the one that others do not covet, and precisely that one that makes not-coveting (i.e., minding one's own business) its essential task. Odysseus had learned what Socrates has defined as justice, and it led him to choose the best form of life.

The *Republic* has a carefully crafted ring or pedimental architecture in which sections in the first half of the dialogue have thematic echoes in the latter half, a kind of semantic palindrome as in ABCCBA.[39] To give an obvious example, the various iterations of the construction of the city-in speech developed from the second to fourth books are balanced by a stage-by-stage decline of the city from the eighth to the ninth books. Seeing this pattern encourages us to re-examine early episodes in light of its later counterbalancing text.

The Myth of Er is situated in the outermost ring of the *Republic*. Its thematic partner text can only be the opening gathering inside the tent of

Cephalus during the festival of Bendis. The first word of the dialogue, *kataben* ("I went down"), corresponds to the descent into the underworld that Er narrates. (There are also echoes in this of the cave allegory in which the one who has seen the sun illuminating a land of real things goes back into the world of shadows to liberate the prisoners there.) If so, then the characters gathered in Piraeus are being liken to the souls choosing the lives they will lead. Indeed, they are.

Choosing our mediators is analogous to choosing a daimon in Er's story. We are always choosing our form of life and are constantly being seduced by the mimetically mediated models we find around us. We see this in the characters in the opening scene. Polemarchus is loyal to the consensus morality, for better or worse; Thrasymachus is attracted to sophistry and Cleitophon to Thrasymachus; Glaucon and Adeimantus are being seduced by a lust for political power. Socrates as savior is trying to turn them away from these illusory forms. He is the "good" mediator in the text.

We cannot give up mimesis: there is no desire without it. We are mimetic by necessity. But we do have some power to resist corrupt influences and devote ourselves to those that restore us to health and sanity. There are clear markers of bad models: escalating conflict over increasingly scarce objects; the stoking of vehement passions like anger, envy, or spite; obsession with what we don't have and disappointment with what we do; a passion for objects that require the exclusion of others for their attainment. We must instead cultivate contempt for those objects of aspiration that lead us deeper into either scandal or feelings of deprivation. We must, as Socrates puts it, "choose the mean": "And we must always know how to choose the mean in such lives and how to avoid either of the extremes, as far as possible, both in this life and in all those beyond it. This is the way that a human being becomes happiest" (619a).

The *Republic* proposes an education concerned with disciplining mimetic desire. Whether the outline of an education presented there is sufficient to lead us out of the shadow world of mimetic desire and into something truer is an open question that the dialogue invites us to explore. In any case, the dialogue gives us plenty of resources to guide our ascent. In this respect Plato can be classified as a great novelist in the sense meant by René Girard: "The novelist is interested neither in the petty reality of the object nor in that same object transfigured by desire; he is interested in the

process of transfiguration. This has always been the fundamental concern of the great novelists."[40]

The issue for both Plato and Girard is serious, and the stakes are high. The final word goes to Socrates: "Now, it seems that it is here [i.e., the choice of life] Glaucon, that a human being faces the greatest danger of all. And because of this, each of us must neglect all other subjects and be most concerned to seek out and learn those that will enable him to distinguish the good life from the bad and always to make the best choice possible in every situation. He should think over all the things we have mentioned and how they jointly and severally determine what the virtuous life is like" (618b–c).

NOTES

1. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 15.

2. René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 119–20.

3. René Girard, *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 168–69.

4. René Girard, *Violence, the Sacred, and Things Hidden: A Discussion with René Girard at Esprit* (*1973*) (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2021), 16–17.

5. René Girard, with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 45, 222–23. Girard's source text is *Republic* 361b–362a. In the same passage, Girard interestingly suggests the similarity to biblical themes found in this passage may not be an accident: "This could perhaps be derived from the Bible, which Plato may have known, since he travelled to Egypt, where there were many Jews at that time."

6. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 17.

7. Girard, *The One by Whom*, 120.

8. Seth Benardete, *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 407.

9. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 16.

10. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 97–98.

11. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 15.

12. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 16.

13. *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 377e–378a. The italics have been added for emphasis. All passages from Plato will be from this edition and cited in the text using Stephanus numbers.

14. René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 27.

15. In a discussion of poetic types in 392c–398b, “the narrative style” is sanctioned for wide use whereas the “imitative style” is limited to imitations of a “decent person.” Plato flouts even this law in the *Republic* in that the entire dialogue is narrated by means of (an imitation of) Socrates, supposedly speaking in his own voice.

16. The relation of Plato’s family members to the Critian oligarchy and what it might entail for interpreting the *Republic* has been explored brilliantly by Jacob Howland in *Glaucon’s Fate: History, Myth, and Character in Plato’s* Republic (Philadelphia: Paul Dry, 2018).

17. William H. F. Altman, *Plato the Teacher: The Crisis of the Republic* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington, 2012), xxi.

18. Ruby Blondell, “Letting Plato Speak for Himself: Character and Method in the *Republic*,” in *Who Speaks for Plato? Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, ed. Gerald Press (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 144.

19. Girard, *The One by Whom*, 119–20.

20. Girard, *When These Things*, 12.

21. See for instance the work of prominent Plato scholars Francisco Gonzales, Charles Griswold, Mitchell Miller, Jacob Klein, John Sallis, Eva Brann, Leo Strauss, Laurence Lampert, Drew Hyland, Jill Gordon, and Seth Benardete. There are many more.

22. See 338c. Socrates’s critical examination of Thrasymachus’s definition—that justice is the “advantage of the stronger”—reveals Thrasymachan justice to be neither advantageous nor stronger. Thrasymachus’s understanding of “advantage” (*sumpheron*) is different from Socrates’s. Thrasymachus uses *sumpheron* to mean “profit” or “advantage,” with a strong tilt toward the idea of “advantage over.” This necessitates a winner and loser. Socrates agrees that justice is a *sumpheron* but hugs closer to the etymological sense of “bearing with” as one might assist another in battle. Socrates and Thrasymachus have contradictory understandings of *sumpheron*. Thrasymachus is imitating what he takes to be Socrates’s desire for victory and honor. On the other side, Socrates is imitating a deep-set desire in all human beings to understand and pursue the best form of life. He imitates what he takes to be Thrasymachus’s desire to know and enact the best form of life. Thrasymachus asserts a *sumpheron* as desired by competitive desire, i.e., *thumos*; Socrates’s *sumpheron* is that desired by our rational (but still impassioned) capacities like *phronesis* and *dianoia*.

23. See entry for *πλεονεκτέω* in Liddell-Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon, 7th Edition* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1997).

24. See *Republic*, 368c–369b.

25. Both words share a common root with the Greek word for sacrifice, *thusia*. The thustem comes from an Indo-European word for “smoke” or “vapor.” The smoke rising in a sacrificial pyre would be interpreted as the life-force (*thumos*) rising from the body. The English word “fume,” which can mean either “vapor” or “to be angry,” has the same lineage.

26. *Epithumeo* is the Greek verb used in the Septuagint for “covet,” as in the tenth commandment “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife . . .” For René Girard’s interpretation of the commandment against coveting, see *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 7–18.

27. Juvenal, *Satire VI*, lines 347–48.

28. *Thumoeides* is one part of Socrates’s tripartite psychology—along with the *epithumetikon* (desiring part) and the *logistikon* (calculating part) in 440e–442c.

29. See Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

30. Some modern theorists have even suggested that before there was literacy there was nothing equivalent to what we would call a conscience. See Barry Sanders, *A is for Ox: The Collapse of*

Literacy and the Rise of Violence in an Electronic Age (New York: Random House, 1994).

31. Girard, *When These Things Begin*, 45.

32. In 379a–383c, Socrates's lays down two theological patterns that are really requirements for any lasting norm: (1) a god (i.e., transcendent norm) is a cause of good effects only, never harmful ones; and (2) a god (i.e., a transcendent norm) does not dissemble but is always true and unchanging in appearance.

33. Sarah Broadie, *Aristotle and Beyond: Essays on Metaphysics and Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 154–55.

34. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 295.

35. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 193.

36. Ibid., 197.

37. Ibid., 294.

38. Ibid., 295.

39. Fuller discussions of the "ring" or "pedimental" structure of the *Republic* may be found in Holger Thesleff, *Platonic Patterns*: *A Collection of Studies* (Las Vegas: Parmenides, 2009); Eva Brann, *The Music of the Republic* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry, 2012); and Eric Voegelin, *Order and History, Volume III*: *Plato and Aristotle* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

40. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 219.

Augustine of Hippo

Thomas Ryba

THE UBIQUITY OF AUGUSTINIAN IDEAS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY is a measure of their durability and perennial relevance. Whether embraced or taken as foils, these ideas are evoked and entertained as objects for reflection by thinkers as diverse as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre, and—of course—René Girard.

Sartre's philosophy is an example of Augustine taken as foil. *Being and Nothingness* is about as complete an inversion of Augustine's philosophical theology as imaginable. Where Sartre puts the self, Augustine puts God; where Sartre describes free will as radically autonomous, Augustine describes free will as in obedience to God; whereas Sartre sees other people as hell, Augustine sees them as the instrument and the purpose of salvation; whereas Sartre sees nothingness as the basis for the self-creation of the authentic individual, Augustine sees nothingness as the deficient condition of all creatures, but especially humans who are "hard-wired" to search for something to remedy it.

Another twentieth-century fellow traveler with Augustine—at least with respect to the recognition of the need to fill an inherent deficiency of being—was Gabriel Marcel. In his 1933 essay, "On the Ontological Mystery," Marcel characterized the malady of the age as a loss of the sense *of* the awareness of being and in that awareness's necessity. In this still timely essay—but also more generally throughout his writings—Marcel develops a symptomology of this epidemic. For him, modernity grounded a form of life in which everything is reduced to an inhuman functionalism, a form of life which is devoid of mystery, is empty, and leads to despair.[1] Life in this

form means despair at the "inefficacy" of the technical to address "fear and desire, which are inseparable."[2] It is a form of life in which awareness of this fundamental "ontological need" is repressed "in exact proportion to the breaking up of personality . . . and to the triumph of the 'purely natural' and the consequent atrophy of the faculty of wonder."[3]

The sickness that Marcel highlighted nearly a hundred years ago has been inflamed by the thralldom of postmodernism, even though, recently (and happily), the postmodern seems to be losing its grip. Today, little has changed in the diagnosis of this malaise, except that a new epidemiology has been proposed to explain its pervasive communicability.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that the nagging awareness of this sickness is unique to thinkers of the last hundred years or that the cure is entirely different than has been repeatedly proposed. Some sixteen hundred years prior, Augustine anticipated Marcel's description of this ontological sickness and suggested that it was a constant accompaniment to the human condition. Sixteen hundred years after Augustine, René Girard—with narrower focus—affirmed the essential rectitude of the Augustinian diagnosis but has given it a contemporary explanation, especially in response to twentieth-century thinkers like Sartre.

René Girard's thought bears so many similarities to that of Augustine's that Girard himself made the hyperbolic claim that three-quarters of everything in his writings *were already in* Augustine.[4] Spoken by Girard himself, this claim is humble and self-effacing, but it could lead to undervaluing his originality. Later, in an interview with Laurent Linneuil and the Abbé de Tanoüarn for the French journal *Certitudes*, Girard clarifies this claim, calling it a "quip," which he believed "in a certain way."[5] This meandering interview establishes two planes of intersection between Girard's thought and that of Augustine: the mutual recognition of the mimetic origins of violence and the necessity of self-sacrifice as the answer to violence. Though it is true that Girard's outlook is remarkably close to that of Augustine's on these points, there are also significant differences.

Desire and Nihility in the Thought of Augustine of Hippo and René Girard

Both Augustine and Girard agree, in a remarkable way, about the scale of nihility associated with desire.[6] Each sees it as the inverse of ascent to the love of God.[7] Mimetic desire played out to its logical conclusion means the perverse embrace of nihility. One ladder extends downward, through increasing levels of disorder, to less being. The other ladder extends upward, through increasing levels of order, to more being. Both agree that humans go wrong when they imagine that a finite immanent object can take the place of an infinite transcendent object. For both, fascination by the idol is the inverse of contemplation of God.

Nihility according to Augustine

Augustine's thoughts on the nihility at the core of human personhood are summarized in words contained in the invocation that opens the *Confessions*: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions* 1:1:1). There, Augustine intimates a connection between three themes intrinsically related through the span of his theological project: nothingness, human nature, and desire. Augustine's treatment of nihility has ontological, epistemological, and religious dimensions. Nihility is a characteristic of all created beings. Only the sage knows this, but it takes a sage who is *also* a saint to understand that only Christian virtue can remedy it. At different periods of his career, Augustine characterized this "achievement" of the beatific life in various ways. In his early writings, the Neoplatonic project drives his understanding of Christianity. There, he understands this achievement principally as an intellectual ascent to God with love of the object as a precondition.[8] He describes it in terms of movement "upward" and, at the same time, "inward" (*Christian Doctrine*, 2:7:9–11; *Confessions*, 10:6:9). Its means are those of mental culture, first, then liberal sciences, mathematics, and dialectics: "The data of faith" must be studied "in light of philosophy" (*On Order*, 2:5:16).[9] Augustine, in his later writings, makes the scriptural theme of Christian love prominent, so that the beatific life as the fullness of being, truth, and love presupposes a spiritual ascent to selfless love as much as it requires a growth in wisdom.

That beings (other than the Supreme being, *the One*) are divided, in flux, temporally and spatially extended, imperfect, limited, and (in some sense) unreal, though the One is indivisible, immutable, eternal, hyper-spatial,

perfect, unlimited, and consummately real are Neoplatonic commonplaces that precede Augustine's theology but which he incorporates into it.[10] That the imperfect reverts toward its origin; that all things desire and aspire to union with the One, "each in the measure of its ability from the lowest ranks of the universe [on] up"; and that they aspire to it necessarily are teachings of Plotinus that Augustine received through his reading of the *Platonic Books*[11] and the commentator and disciple of Plotinus, Porphyry (*Enneads*, 1:8:2, 2:2:2, 2:9:1; *Definitions*, Aphorism 30).[12]

According to the Neoplatonists, the cosmos—excluding the One—forms a scale based upon the relative materiality and formality in things. Matter "is formless, variable, impotent," mutable, deceptive, and contradictory. It is at the extreme limit of the negation of being. It lacks reality. It is a nihility whose very nature is to be a medium for the imitation of the forms that possess being. In contrast to matter, which is barely a something, beings are scaled based upon their participation of the forms, living ensouled creatures forming the upper echelons of the hierarchy of reality and immortally ensouled beings occupying the highest levels under the One (*Enneads*, 3:6:7: 3–27; *Launching Points*, Aphorism 10). As things fail to achieve the ends (*fines*/*teloi*) for which they exist, they veer away from their intended perfection and tend—without losing their identity—toward a relative state of nonbeing *vis-à-vis* other realized things of their kind. Thus, at the core of all creations is an instability that causes a "fall" toward nonbeing, a nonbeing that is only prevented by some fundamental level of formality (structure). The lapse into relative nonbeing from a state of robust being is a function of the being's nature and its history. Augustine accepts this philosophic blueprint but joins it with Christian teachings and his own observations about human experience in order to supply a unique take on the human predicament.

Augustine's meditations on nihility are based, in part, on observations of the congenital human experience of dissatisfaction with finite being. For Augustine, humans possess "an ontological hunger," a craving to be that is also tantamount to a desire for stability (*Free Choice*, 3:7:20).[13] They have this desire because they are deficient in being and are mutable. Desire is a restless craving to offset this deficiency by finding fulfillment in objects, people, power, or ideas. All humans seek satisfaction by possessing such things, but this satisfaction is thwarted for two reasons. All created things are both mutable and generically inappropriate to satisfy the desire.

That created beings can lose their structure and be broken down—or that they are simply changeable—poses the first barrier to satisfying possession or union. Even if a thing that was durable and constant existed, so long as it was a created thing, it could not satisfy because the natural propensity to possess and be satisfied in that possession takes God as a unique object. Glossing Augustine, Thomas Aquinas would later draw the conclusion that human desire was infinite (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, 2ae: Q. 1: Art. 5, 6, 8; Q. 3: Art. 1, 4; Q. 30: Art. 4). Both Augustine and Thomas agree that human desire can only be satisfied by God—the perfect, infinite object of enjoyment.

Augustine compares desire for creations to people who eat things incapable of nourishing them (*Beatific Life*, 1:8; *Music*, 6:5:13; *True Religion*, 2:22–23). Like the starving, the deluded try to make the wrong things satisfying. Like those who eat pine cones, grass, rocks, or dirt to staunch pains of starvation, the deluded are either only momentarily satisfied or sickened by whatever they wolf down. On the other hand, the illuminated are those who recognize the true object of their desire, pursue it, and find themselves nourished, sustained, fruitful, and satisfied.

In the *Beatific Life* (4:35), Augustine describes the proper object of desire as God and its fulfillment as "a satiating possession of God."[14] According to Augustine, possession in relation to God is of two kinds. The lower kind is common to all creations which he describes as possessed *by* God (*habieri a deo*) (3:31; 4:34). All beings are in this relation because God is their ontological first cause. Whether they have realized perfection or not, all humans are possessed *of* God in this sense. But only those who have attained perfection can possess the proper object of infinite desire. These are in union with God and may be said to possess God (*habere deum*). This is a relationship that supplies the object (and relationship) that is lacking in congenital human desire.[15]

Augustine finesses these relations between God and humans through a series of prepositions. All humans are *in* God, but realized humans also have God *in* them (*Music*, 6:13:40). All humans are *with* God (*esse cum deo*), but realized humans are *not without* God (*non esse sine deo*) (*On Order*, 2:7:20; *On the Trinity*, 14:12:15). To be with God is lesser being (*minus esse*), but to have God within one is the greater being (*magis esse*) (*Academics*, 3:19:42). To be *with* God but *without* God is to be an *outer human* living in the outer world; to be *with* God but *not without* God is to

be an *inner human* living in the inner world of spiritual congress (*Teacher*, 1:2; 11:38; 12:40; *True Religion*, 39:72; *Confessions* 6:9; *Retractions*, 1:12). In contrast, rejection of God is double-closure, a shutting off from both God and the true self (*Sermon* 142:3:3). Return to God is to have access to both God and self. Though his use of prepositions may seem to be mere wordplay, in each case Augustine is attempting to express a relationship between substances and accidents according to the Aristotelian categories (most likely as interpreted by Porphyry).[16]

Because humans were designed *by* God to possess a potentiality *for* God, and because—in his Neoplatonic schema—God is convertible with maximal being, and being is convertible with maximal truth and maximal beauty, Augustine sees the human deficit as fulfilled in God, who fills the nihility and hunger for all three. Pre-eminently, God is *he who truly is*—and Augustine describes deficient humans not possessing God as not possessing full being.[17] To desire without satisfaction is to be less real, while to find satisfaction in God is the achievement of maximum human reality.

Much characterized as *Augustinian* can be found in Plotinus and Porphyry. But Augustine adds a modification commonly thematic in Christian teaching, namely, that the recovery of union with the divine is hampered by a congenital human condition, a condition not recognized by the Greco-Roman philosophers. This condition exacerbates human ignorance and desire and misdirects desire toward things that cannot satisfy it. This condition is *original sin*, and Augustine was the architect of its classic formulation in the Western theological tradition.

Nihility according to Girard

Like Augustine, Girard believes that negative human desire is consequent from a broken relationship with God. God is the appropriate object and the mediator of this right relationship. He is a transcendent object. Being in the right relationship with this object supplements the being of humans. This right relationship is vertical transcendency, while the broken relationship Girard calls "deviated transcendency."[18] Deviated transcendency is the deluded state of human existence characterized by the search for something that will substitute adequately for *the* appropriate transcendent object, that is, it is a search for something that will substitute for God.

Directed away from its proper object, this search and possession are unsatisfactory. Even a consummate egoism cannot deliver an object—the self—that can substitute for God. The frustration of dissatisfaction is described by Girard in words reminiscent of Augustine: "The desiring subject, when he takes possession of the object, finds he is grasping a void; . . . he possesses the object but that object loses its value in the very act of being possessed."[19]

The subject tries to escape from this straitjacket of frustration by fixing on another object, and so the process continues, the renewal of desire and frustration repeated with each discovery that the object is empty and adds nothing to the emptiness of the subject's being. Because the subject refuses to renounce all desire, the consequence will be impotence, disillusionment, boredom, and suicide—suicide because, rather than returning to the adequate object of vertical transcendency, and exhausted by the impossibility of an ultimate deviated transcendency, the subject willfully rejects all alternatives in favor of a consummate experience within her/his control: death.[20] Suicide, as the subjective and willful achievement of the nothingness that ends desire, is an ultimate "no" shouted both at desire's frustration and to God and the possibility of vertical transcendency.[21] On point, here, is the way Girard treats Kirillov's death in *The Possessed*. This treatment is complex, because, in it, Girard discloses a nest of relationships. Kirillov's death is an example of Girard's view that the ultimate rejection of vertical transcendency results in an infernal doubling of the religious path. This is analogous to Augustine's trope of the two cities, the major theme in the *City of God*.

Girard's view that the practical pursuit of self-deification coincides with nothingness is the obverse to Augustine's view that union with God means the plentitude of being. In Kirillov's slide toward suicide, Girard is not only able to cast doubt upon the inherent good of self-sacrifice (and any asceticism serving the ends of consummate egoism), but he also shows that the rejection of all desire directed toward other objects carried into practice results in a consummate act of will to destroy oneself.[22] Kirillov's act is intended as the infernal double of Jesus's death on the cross. Through it (he imagines) that his antithetical conquest of death will become the ultimate object lesson for nihilists. He imagines that his act will have the power to undo the "laws of transgression and redemption" instaurated by Christ.[23]

Girard recognizes that Dostoevsky has identified the limit case for one who (in his willfulness) would seize the power of God. Like Augustine, Girard names this egotistical willfulness "pride." Thus, again like Augustine (*City of God*, 1:17 and 24, *Free Choice*, 3:8), Girard posits suicide as a false surrogate for the stability and being one finds in God.[24]

Intended as such, or not, all deviated transcendency is a form of idolatry because it seeks the transcendent in created things. Here, again, is a parallel between the Augustinian and Girardian characterizations of the conditioning state of humans. Both understand this state as idolatrous.[25]

The paths of both transcendencies stand in reverse mirror image to one another. "The further" one "strays from God . . . the deeper" one "plunges into the irrational, at first in the name of reason, and finally in" one's "own name."[26] Deviated transcendency is a descent into self-idolatry, ignorance, vice, a division of self and others, and annihilation. The ascent and reclamation of vertical transcendency—as Augustine observed—works in reverse order. Vertical transcendency is an ascent into mystical union, knowledge, virtue, a unification of self and others, and fullness of being. The descent is an infernal doubling of the ascent to God because to turn away from God is to lose being, while to turn toward God is to reclaim it.

Like Augustine, Girard also recognizes that a misdirected search for a substitute object is a defining feature of all human life. All humans suffer from an ontological deficit—an emptiness—that makes them seek satisfaction in other beings. In Girard's writings, this nihility of being is characterized from inside-out human consciousness. Its sign is a pervasive (but not necessarily conscious) craving for the completion of something the subject lacks. In his earlier works, Girard does not theorize about the first cause of this deficit or whether there was a primal catastrophe responsible for it. He simply emphasizes the universality of the condition.

Augustine and Girard on Desire

In formulating his explanation of desire, Augustine's principal focus is on its varieties and objects, whereas Girard focuses on its structure and consequences for human relations. Both recognize desire as having a positive and negative polarity, Augustine emphasizing its underlying neutrality and rootedness in volition, while Girard, though proclaiming it

positive, mostly recounts its automatisms and the ways desire can go wrong.

Desire according to Augustine

That desire is a kind of intentionality is confirmed by Augustine's speaking of it as an act of will resulting in a relation that is directed to objects resulting in actions that bring about satisfaction in use, consumption, possession, or union. Without the directed will to desire (*dilectio*), nothing follows. Desire (in the broad sense) is neutral. It may be either evil or good. Any of these elements going wrong is sufficient to make a desire evil: if it takes a disordered delight in the wrong objects, establishes the wrong relations, or does evil things. In each case, the root cause of evil is the evil will. Evil desire and its consequences add to the nihility of human being.

Good desire takes God above all things and then neighbors (without distinction from self) as appropriate objects. The will, relations, objects of good desire, and its actions are ordered. As with love of God and neighbor, good love is bidirectional and results in an increase in being. Only this desire is properly called love, otherwise it is a species of covetousness (*On the Trinity* 8:7:11). Good love is only possible, after the fall, because God enables it through a restoration of relationship and a supply of sustaining energy (grace). This restoration is tantamount to an increase in being. In his early writings, Augustine seemed to hold onto the possibility that good love (and wisdom) could achieve perfection in this life so that the ontological satisfaction would be complete and perfection reached. In his later writings, he recognizes that this love can only find fulfillment in the afterlife, though its superiority, here, far surpasses that of misdirected desire.

To indicate positive desire, Augustine most commonly employs *desiderium, dilectio, amor*, and *caritas*, though again positive or negative connotations depend upon his choice of objects and modifying adjectives.[27] Because Augustine, in later works, commonly uses "concupiscence" for negative sexual desire, some interpreters have taken it to stand for *all* desire, but this is mistaken.[28] As both Burnaby and Nisula observe, Augustine's naming of desire is often ad hoc.[29] The fluidity of the terms he employs to designate desire is conditioned by the theological theme he is addressing. For example, the frequency of Augustine's later use of "concupiscence" is the effect of his preoccupation with Pelagian theological

controversies. Sometimes by a change in adjective, he transforms what might seem to be a negative term for into a positive term. Laudable desire (*desiderium*), for example, is established by its good object.[30]

Throughout his writings, Augustine especially employs three words to denote negative desire: "*concupiscentia*," "*cupiditas*," and "*libido*."[31] Though Augustine uses these three Latin words to signify evil desire, less commonly he also uses them to refer to good desire, when the objects they take, or the adjectives modifying these terms, indicate it.[32]

By frequency, "concupiscence" is Augustine's most preferred word for evil desire or craving, and in this he was influenced by this word's prevalence in the Latin Bible translations he read.[33] His secondary preference is "libido." A word with sexual connotations, "libido"—like "concupiscence"—can also be used by Augustine of things other than sexual desire.[34] In his dispute with Julian, for example, he qualifies the meaning of lust (*libido*), broadens it from its specifically sexual connotations and applies it to enmity, avarice, insolence, pride, greed, drunkenness, hypocrisy, and mendacity (*Against Julian*, 2:8:28).

In his early works especially, Augustine favors mentioning evil desire (*concupiscentia* or *cupiditas*) as a complex of three nouns, *libido* (illicit sexual desire), *curiositas* (illicit curiosity), *superbia* (illicit pride), being a favored triple.[35] Sometimes, however, he prefers the triple set of adjectives, *turpis* (shameful), *prava* (perverse), and *improba* (reprobate).[36] Closely connected with these schemas of three is Augustine's claim that all sin issues from a three-fold root. The consequence of original sin thus becomes a threefold concupiscence. Following 1 John 2:16, Augustine names this triplex either *uoluptas carnis* (enjoyment of the flesh), *concupiscentia oculorum* (longing of the eyes), and *ambitio saeculi* (struggle for glory) or, alternatively, voluptuousness (*voluptates*), pride (*superbia*), and curiosity (*curiositas*).[37] Both Augustinian triple-roots probably owe their origin to Plato, filtered through Neoplatonic mediators and Christian doctrine.[38]

Apart from this commonality, each kind of desire is poly-thematic: it takes many objects that are generically similar. Augustine interprets voluptuousness—enjoyment of the flesh—as the desire to luxuriate in the available pleasures of the body while avoiding inconvenient discipline necessary to virtuous growth. It is a desire to staunch restless dissatisfaction in easy and available pleasures. Sinful pride—ambition for glory—is the

idolatrous will to power, the will to subordinate everything under its control. Finally, curiosity—the longing of the eyes—is a voyeuristic desire to see awful or glittering wonders, but it also covers the desire to know many things, either as titillating experiences, as possessions of the subject—and thus as ends in themselves—as means to magnify the stature of the knower, or as means to engage in the occult control of nature (*On True Religion*, 72–101; *Confessions*, 10:55).

This triple radix means that any goodness that may issue from desire's flawed pursuit is always compromised. This is especially true of the Greek philosophers. The knowledge of God they may achieve is occluded by curiosity. Their obedience to the order of being is obstructed by proud self-direction. Their appreciation of the beauty of creation is deflected by carnal enjoyment.

Augustine also triples the varieties of good love (*desiderium*) in a way that parallels evil desire. *Desiderium* (in the good sense) most often covers the *amor-dilectio-caritas* complex.[39] Though Augustine often simply opposes *concupiscientia* (profane desire) to *caritas* (holy love), the more granular and nuanced distinctions between three varieties of *concupiscientia* and three varieties of *desiderium* serve his theological ontology much better than this binary distinction. *Desiderium*—the umbrella description—has the connotation of an ardent wish or desire for something lost or for something lacking.[40] As such, it characterizes the intentionality of love directed to its only adequate object—God, especially after the deficit of being caused by the Fall. This meaning, the way Augustine deploys it, is implicit in the three species of holy love covered by it.

Desire as *amor* is the virtuous opposite of *libido* (lust). *Amor*, in the positive sense, refers to the warm esteem or regard one has for family, friends, or other humans as well as the desire for fellowship with them—a love that can only be complete if the love of God is perfect.[41] Desire as *dilectio* is the virtuous opposite of *curiositas* (the desire for superficial knowledge that titillates, that inflates the ego, or that serves egotistical purposes). As curiosity's opposite, *dilectio* is the desire to delight in the contemplation of God; it is the intellectual cause that moves the will to union with God.[42] Finally, *caritas* (charity) is the virtuous opposite of *superbia* (pride). *Caritas* is the perfection of love. Its beloveds are considered as having the highest value and are treated with the highest

esteem and respect.[43] For the charitable, God is the ultimate object of love. Humans are penultimate and can only be loved rightly if God is rightly loved. For Augustine, charity for humans entails that one makes no distinction between the inner humanity of others—their species being and souls—and one's own, so that by providing for their needs and loving them as one loves oneself, salvation may be attained, together.[44] *Superbia* is its opposite because it is utilitarian.[45] It subordinates others to self, reducing them to mere instruments of one's desires. In the desire of the egotist, there is no room for God. If *caritas* is the apogee of the love of God, then *superbia* is its nadir.

Augustine's discussions of the triple-root of good and evil desire are pitched to identify the objects, use, and intentions of acts of desire. This is in the service of making the classification of sins, vices, and virtues easier. It also serves to distinguish the ordered ways in which goods may be enjoyed corporately and those which are to be enjoyed individually.

The act of desire is underdetermined by any created object. For this reason, Augustine can always find something positive about human desire. When humans are confused about desire's proper object, in their lusting after inadequate objects, and in their frustration of satisfaction, desire nevertheless points toward an elusive object of consummation. *Fallen* love is a desire that gropes for the only object that can fulfill it, but its common feature is that its only proper object is hidden.[46]

Desire according to Girard

According to Girard, what has until now been missed about desire—what has been missed even by Augustine—is its universal triangular structure, a structure consisting of subject, object, and mediator (or model).[47] Though the object of desire would seem to be what the subject wishes to possess, and though the desire would seem to be attraction to the object's properties, Girard argues that this is an illusion.[48] The object has been fetishized by an individual or group that has already modeled desire for it, a desire that the subject pre-apprehensively imitates. This means that *what* the subject desires in the object is an illusory reality—a false and empty promise—and this has been projected onto it by someone else. Thus, the object's worth has been pre-established by another or others. For this reason, the subject

does not desire the object for its real value, qualities, or use, the subject *imitates* the desire of the other for it. In other words, the subject "catches" the contagious desire of others.[49] The subject really desires the desire of others for it. This desire is mostly illusory and unconscious. Like Augustinian desire, Girardian mimetic desire is bivalent. It can be good or evil—depending upon its objects. Girard (somewhat surprisingly) describes it as "intrinsically good, in the sense that far from being merely imitative in a small sense, it's the opening out of itself."[50] But it can be turned either positively toward vertical transcendency or negatively toward deviated transcendency.[51] Deviated transcendency puts other subjects and things (as objects of desire) into the position of idols in which the subject attempts to find fulfillment.[52] Deviated transcendency means that the love that ought to be directed to God is twisted into a circuit that takes substitute objects and models in the place of God and ends in idolatry of self.[53]

The first recognition about desire is that desire presupposes deviated transcendency; it can never deliver a created object as a satisfying object. This is the recognition of the fundamental ontological inadequacy of any created object of desire. Here, Augustine and Girard agree about the nihility of subject and object, though Augustine approaches it from the side of objectivity—the subject and object *really* tend toward nothingness—and Girard approaches it from the side of the subject—subject and object are experienced as empty. Their two perspectives often coincide. The second recognition about desire is that it is mimetically constituted. That all desire is imitative is one of Girard's most profound insights. Desire's intensity—as well as the intensity of disappointment—can be increased by the involvement of the other upon whom one's own desire has been modeled. This intensity is proportional to the social distance between the subject and the model. Unlike the Augustinian model of desire—one in which imitation plays a lesser role and desire can be an autonomous pulsion of the subject toward the object—Girard sees desire as a product of deviated transcendency, intersubjective mimesis, and social distance. Its intentional structure is not linear—from the subject to the object—but triangular—from the subject, through the model or mediator, to the object, only the model is not usually recognized as the source of the desire the subject feels for the object. From the subject's side, desire seems to be contained, one's own, and autonomously controlled. It seems not to be shared or borrowed. But

this is a self-deception that makes competition for the desired object all the more intense. In fact, desire is not autonomous; it is *interdividual*.

Triangularity of desire has a subjective structure whose intensity and kind is determined by its social dimensions. The relationship between subject, model, and object may be one in which the model is at a great social distance from the subject. In this case, the model mediates desire without the possibility of close competition. This does not mean that the attainment of the object is not disappointing, simply that the subject's movement toward it is unhampered or without an obstacle. Girard calls this kind of model (and the subject's imitation of it) external. But so long as emulation of even an external model is characterized by deviated transcendency, the result will be frustration.

When, however, the social distance to the model is close, when the model is in actual competition for the same object, when the imitation of the subject and model is internal, then the reciprocal imitation of desire drives model and subject into frenzy. At this point, violence breaks out.

If the model and object of desire coincide—as is the case with envy and in unhealthy sexual relationships—then what the subject may seek in the mediator-model-object is more than possession. The subject may desire—against all possibility—either to worship the model-object or to become the model-object.

In every case of deviated transcendency, no matter what the model or object, the outcome is the same dissatisfaction. When the subject is exhausted by the madness of mimetic desire and the repetition it engenders with the expectation of different results, then the subject enters the nadir of being. Having exhausted all models and all objects, and having rejected vertical transcendency, only one alternative is left—to still the desire for impossible fulfillment by physical self-destruction.

Deviated transcendency of the highly mediated kind has three major stages.[54] I would argue that the first two are both stages of *metaphysical desire*; the first as a stage of incipient metaphysical desire, and the second as the stage of full-blown metaphysical desire. This is metaphysical desire, proper. The third stage is no longer a desire for being at all but a desire to stop the desire for it. This stage may be called *meontic desire* (Greek: *me-* [not] + *ontos* [being]).[55]

At the first stage, the subject attempts to "fill" personal emptiness by possessing things or others. This involves the subject's imitation of and

competition with the model's desire for specific objects, all of which eventually prove to be inadequate. If social proximity is increased further, then the desire of the subject may become sicker.[56]

At this stage, the model-obstacle can merge with the desired object. The model-object thus becomes the thing that promises satisfaction, and the subject desires to possess the model or the inimitable features of the model (and perhaps vice versa). In other words, the subject desires to *become* the model. This is the stage of metaphysical desire proper, where the subject wishes to join with the being of the model or absorb the being of the model, the presumption being that such union will erase the subject's nihility.[57]

The final stage of internal mediation is nihilistic.[58] It occurs as the subject turns from any expectation of fulfillment to embrace nihility itself. When the subject discovers the impossibility of autonomously desiring, when the realization sets in that both control of the stream of desire and satisfaction in any object of desire (including the self) are impossible, the ultimate option is to become nothing. The subject thus desires release in what it has almost completely become. What began in a mimetic contest to fill a void becomes the embrace of the void at the fruitless end of the mimetic contest.[59] This is the radical limit and darkest stage to all deviated transcendency driven by internal mediation.[60] This stage may be characterized as driven by *meontic* desire.[61]

Girard also maintains that deviated transcendency is mirrored in its sequential development in the subject and in the culture to which the subject belongs. When the desire's model is at great distance, as in external mediation, then cycles of the circulation of desire and frustration become much longer; along with them, the genesis of violence and other vices is much diminished. But as the social distance between a model of desire and subject decreases—as a model becomes a competitor and thus an obstacle to the subject's desire—the cycles of the circulation of desire and frustration increase in frequency, and the genesis of violence and vice is accelerated.

The inadequacy of the object, its deficiency, is the repeated discovery of the subject, but because the subject is blind to the fact that desire is borrowed from another, the means to short-circuit the intensification of competition and fruitless pursuit of satisfaction remains hidden. Girard is no gnostic. Even when the triangularity of desire is understood, mere understanding or consciousness-raising is not by itself an antidote.

With this realization, the intellectual biographies of Augustine and Girard are drawn close together. Both initially characterized the restoration of right transcendency principally in terms of knowledge or awareness, both concluded that awareness alone was insufficient. Both eventually arrived at the conclusion that the cure was God's grace and the imitation of Christ, including all that the two entail.

For Girard, like Augustine, the healing power of positive desire must be bipolar: it must be directed to God first and then to fellow humans. Girard puts this starkly: "Mimetic desire is also the desire for God."[62] Practically, this desire is worked out according to the model that Jesus Christ supplies and which his saints have emulated. Jesus calls people to a double imitation of his actions as performed in the first person and, then through him, as the imitation of God the Father.[63] Girard calls this "innermost mediation," a chain of positive undifferentiation and identification with the right model at its head.[64] This reorientation of the objects of desire, the emulation of God and his mediators, and the putting of this emulation into practice, all are tantamount to conversion—"a transformation that reaches so deep, it changes us once and for all and gives us a new being."[65]

At different times throughout his writings and dialogues, Girard has specified related practices as having the potential to engender a "positive [imitative] contagion."[66] Among them are reconciliation with God and others, nonviolence and the avoidance of scapegoating, compassion for the scapegoated victim, appropriately sacrificial denial of self, love of neighbor and enemies, the speaking of truth, etc.[67] Understood according to the hermeneutic of mimetic desire, the Gospels contain the directives for such practices, with the Sermon on the Mount as their center.[68] Though Christian practices have changed little since Augustine's iterations of them, Girard (in his agreement) provides a new theoretical frame which complements and extends Augustine's original project.

Augustine and Girard on Original Sin

Though there are differences in their respective views of the primacy and the details of Original Sin, both Augustine and Girard understand that it is an important feature in explaining destructive human behavior. Augustine's more comprehensive treatment (relying as it does on his theological

ontology) is pitched toward an explanation of how original sin meant the loss of salvation and how its repair results in salvation's attainment. Girard's less extensive, non-theological treatments of the idea are pitched toward finding an anthropological origin that explains the formation of culture.

Original Sin according to Augustine

To understand the relationship between human nihility, desire, and original sin, it is necessary to understand how Augustine conceptualized human nature. For Augustine, absolute nihility of being is an ideal limit, incapable of being reached. Though other created beings have natures more disordered and mutable than humans, nothing in creation can lapse into complete nothingness. Humans, having immortal souls, never lose created immortality. However, their immortality is neither self-caused nor self-sustaining.[69] Also, the nihility of humans' present state was not original. God created the first parents with the possibility of a tendency toward nothingness, but in their original state, God sustained their fullness of being. Eventually, they lapsed. Their original disobedience, and their preceding ill-will, meant that all humans thereafter would share in a resultant lapse of being, a fall toward non-existence (*Against Secundus*, 11). This tendency toward non-existence, however, is constrained by the formality that humans originally possessed.

In discussing the primal event that exacerbated human nihility, Augustine characterizes the sin of Eve and Adam in such a way that echoes his own vandalism in stripping a pear tree described in his *Confessions* (2:4:9–2:6:12). Playing upon the resemblance of scriptural figures in the primal scene and in his autobiographical narrative (trees, fruit/pears, gardens/orchard, helpmate/delinquent friends), Augustine compares two transgressions to show how both acts are united by their service to nothingness.

In interpretations scattered throughout his works, Augustine characterizes the acts of disobedient eating/vandalistic destruction of the pears as originating in a prior evil will. This will, initially, is characterized by a vaulting pride that is of one piece with refusal of subjection to God and his cosmic order. Humans are "self-pleasers," who find delight and temporary satisfaction in doing the anomic, thus increasing disorder in

themselves and the world (*City of God*, 14:13). Contingent upon this evil will is a nihilifying act. Original sin causes a nihilification that alters human nature universally and permanently.[70] Augustine's vandalism results in reinforcement of his pride and habituation to sin. Augustine describes the intention behind both sins as "to exist in . . . [one's] self, to be . . . [one's] own satisfaction after abandoning God"; their result "is not quite to become a nonentity, but to approximate that" (*City of God*, 14:13). This detachment from God is a "spontaneous" turning away, resulting in a falling toward nothingness, a diminishment and contraction of being (ibid.). He also notes, however, that a contributing condition to Adam's sinfulness and his own was the instigation of others who established models for imitation (*Confessions*, 2:4:9–2:6:14; *Literal Interpretation* 11:42:59). He suggests, outright, that there was a double imitation involved in both actions: the evil wills and intentions that preceded both acts were inverted, perverse imitations of God's sovereignty; the actions that followed from them were provoked by the imitation that comes with friendship, of Adam imitating Eve and of Augustine imitating his delinquent gang.[71]

Augustine has no doubt that the first sin altered human being, but because his religious anthropology is a complex synthesis, the best that can be done here is to provide a sketch of relevant features. Augustine presents a philosophical anthropology that posits stratification in the being of humans. This assumption is not unique to Augustine but is the patrimony of the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies. Augustine, however, reinterprets and modifies prominent features of classical ontology—as he does in his Trinitarian theology. He approaches human personhood from two perspectives: in terms of *stability-mutability* and in terms of *quiddity*.

For Augustine, a human being—the concrete being—possesses four levels of stability: (1) *that* s/he *is*, (2) *as being* a human, (3) as having what *qualifies* a human as a human, (4) as having what qualifies *some particular human* as an individual (*Free Choice*, 3:7:21). At the level of existence, the fact that God has chosen to create a being means that, if mortal, it may be subject to decomposition, but these constituents can never reach an ultimate state of nihility; they still possess structures (formality) (*Soul's Immortality*, 8:13–14). By positing minimal structures in elemental matter, Augustine rejects Plotinus's view that matter is anarchic, nothing, and evil, arguing that *even* elemental matter is good. On this basis, Augustine can say the

enjoyment of any being can be good as long as it is appropriate to God's intention for its enjoyment.

Immortal souls complicate this ontology because they can neither be nullified nor can they decompose into elements. The individual and generic qualities of souls, however, can change, though change cannot negate inherent psychic structure. Some qualities are related to the perfectibility of human nature, and others to the perfectibility of the particular human person. But a broken relation with the object that supplies durable being (God) means to lose the capacity to attain one's divinely intended destiny as a human and as a person. It means to turn from fullness of being to corruption, disorder, and nihility of being.

Augustine's position on human *quiddity*—the species nature shared by all humans—is the same: it is incapable of total nihility. Human souls have a superior formality that means immortality. The human body may decompose into simpler existents, but the human soul cannot. Still, the soul is subject to change. It may become more robust, ordered, and vital, or weaker, disordered, and indolent. Once created, it retains an enduring, overarching structure. Within this structure, the potentialities *qualifying* human nature can either reach fulfillment—in harmony with the unique potentialities that *qualify* the individual—or not (*Free Choice*, 3:7–3:16).[72]

God intends a common end (*finis/telos*) for humans in their species being, but this end is achieved by individual humans in diverse ways. When the species being of humans is directed to God (its proper intended end), it is ordered; when the species being of humans is diverted toward other ends, it is disordered. Likewise, when the end of an individual is directed toward its unique achievement (according to its unique potentialities), it is ordered; when it deviates and is diverted toward other ends, it is disordered. Finally, the individual's end cannot be at odds with humankind's species end. There is a common ordered way that all humans can live. *Within* that way, each individual works out a unique destiny. To deviate from the common end is to lose being. So too, to deviate from one's personal end is to lose being.

Behind these observations is Augustine's idea that the ontological constitution of humans has multiple formalities. Presumed are the form of a creation (as having some sort of stable structure and as existing), the formality of what it means to be human—a formality that includes the sub-formalities constitutive of physical embodiment as well as the formality constitutive of the human soul—the instantiations of human formality that

makes a particular human who s/he is. The levels of stability can be matched to the levels of formality as follows: that one *is* presumes the form of a creation; that one *is human* and possesses what qualifies a human *as* human presumes the formality of what it means to be a human, which includes the sub-formalities of the kinds of constituent matter and a human soul; and that one *is a particular human* presumes that one possesses a unique form of personhood, one that determines what qualifies this particular human. From this it follows that particular humans possess specific material configurations and specific souls. Even though nesting forms are essential to his ontology, Augustine devotes less attention to them or their relation to the Platonic notion of participation as his thought matures.

After the primordial catastrophe, the human condition is one in which the human species being is affected in such a way that human desire is diverted from its common end and object. Because individual humans share in that common nature, their individual ends and desires are diverted as well. This disordering is the ontological effect of original sin. The deviation of the species being and the individual being from their respective but interdependent ends, Augustine calls a fall into nonbeing. Disorder at ontological levels of species being and the individual being means that no humans can achieve the "intensity" of being that they were created to have. In fact, Augustine diagnoses this disorder (in Porphyrian terms) as a necessary accident; it is like a universal habit and second nature (*Religion*, 46:88; *Confessions*, 8:11:26; *Teacher*, 6:7:19).[73] Original sin is an inseparable accident because it is, after the lapse of the primordial parents, found in all humans (with one or two exceptions), even though it does not alter human formality. Like a universal habit, or *second nature*, it disposes the human will to sin.[74] This suggests that the malady attached itself not to *what a human is* but to what *qualifies a human as human* and resultantly also affects what *qualifies* a *particular* human as an individual.[75] Augustine maintains that humans were created to be in relation to God. The desire for this relationship is constitutional; it is structured into them in their species being. In relation, they have fullness of being; their potentialities are properly realized. After the fall, humans are absent from this relation. Their attention afterward is misdirection, a turning away (*aversio*). Crippled in their willing, and confused about an adequate object of desire, they fall into a limited nothingness, a lesser being (*esse minus*). Diverted to other things

—lesser goods, or evil objects—they move restlessly from one dissatisfaction to another because the congenital desire for God can never be satisfied by any object except the one that has fullness of being.[76]

Original Sin according to Girard

Girard's association of negative mimetic desire and original sin is absent in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, even though what he says about the subjective operations of desire there is an important supplement to his later thinking about original sin. Because in that earlier book, he focused attention on the individual's desire for differentiation, the contagion of mimetic desire was confined within the limited structure of subject, object, model, and obstacle. In his later works, and especially in dialogue with Raymund Schwager, Girard began to associate the notion of mimetic desire with original sin, as classically understood. Because Augustine was the theoretician of this condition in the West, some of the elements of the classical model were already present in Girard's reinterpretation. Girard admitted as much, characterizing his views on the matter as "an Augustinian reaction against an excess of humanism" and recognizing the "anthropological intuitiveness" of the Christian and in particular the Augustinian insight into original sin.[77] Wolfgang Palaver has affirmed this affinity, even imagining a scaling of optimism–pessimism about human nature that puts Girard's pessimism closer to Augustine than to Aquinas, Augustine himself being closer to Hobbes.[78]

With Raymund Schwager, Girard worked out many of the specifics of the relationship between mimesis and original sin through wide ranging discussions of biblical *topoi*, psychology, ethology, and anthropology. From these, he arrived at the conclusion that the impetus toward idolatry preceded the mechanism of idolatry, even though humans may have a fundamental desire for God as the object of their satisfaction.

Though Girard may, at times, have spoken as though mimetic desire *is* original sin *tout court*, at other times, he was cagier and less reductionistic. Though he shrunk from an attempt at a definition, he however conceded that "the mimetic system is a big part of it." His reticence to define or unequivocally identify mimetic desire with original sin was, in part, connected to his refusal to do theology or metaphysics. He does come close to a summary of his ideas about the relation between mimesis and original

sin in *Evolution and Conversion*. There he describes original sin as the "bad use of mimesis, and the mimetic mechanism is the actual consequence of this use at the collective level." This mechanism produces a "complex form of transcendence . . . necessary for the survival and development of humanity." It can be defined as "'social transcendence'" (*à la* Durkheim) or as "idolatrous transcendence" in Judeo-Christian terms. A double-edged sword, it both results in violence but also protects against "greater and more disruptive forms of violence." It becomes Satanic when it is not canalized "and kept at bay" in social institutions, which are the very products of the mechanism but which also are responsible for its control. Controlled violence thus becomes the straitjacket of unbridled violence.[79]

The expansiveness of what Girard thought about original sin is better shown through the evidence he marshaled for it, evidence that came from his interpretation of *Genesis*, the hominization of humankind, developmental psychology, and the metaphysical sickness he first described in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*.

Genesis is a touchstone of Girard's characterization of original sin. But it poses unique hermeneutical difficulties because any mythologized narrative, according to Girard, erases the real situation as it mythologizes it. Thus, his reading of *Genesis* is an attempt to dis-occlude reality from appearances by identifying the temptation in the garden as the primal scene of the emergence of negative mimesis. In Girard's understanding, Eve's sin is not hers alone, nor is it original even in its temporal anteriority. Both Adam and Eve are equally guilty. The Serpent is her mediator of desire, just as she is Adam's. The Serpent thus possesses the same desire that is engendered in Eve. Eve's desire is awakened by an obstacle (God's prohibition) but preexists it. In Satan's case the obstacle is an impossibility. Mimetic desire/original sin precedes their respective acts and with it the scapegoating begins immediately with both Adam and Eve claiming diminished responsibility and attributing the cause of their transgression to their respective mediators.[80] This squares with Augustine's own view in *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis* (11:31–32, 35) that concupiscence preceded its enactment.[81] Nevertheless, they all desire the same thing—that is to stand in the place of God. God's prohibition of the fruit is symbolically a prohibition of the self-idolatry that Satan, Adam, and Eve share.

From Adam and Eve, this mimeticism fans out in subsequent generations, infecting Cain and resulting in the first murder. Girard reads

God's destruction of the world by flood as an attempt to quell the chaotic, internecine violence that erupts afterwards. The Noachide laws are God's first attempt formally to canalize desire, canalization that takes the forms of laws and animal sacrifice. What began individually with Adam and Eve in *Genesis* becomes universal in Cain and Abel.[82] Rivalry between Can and Abel is an example of envy, "one of the commonest names given to mimetic rivalry."[83] Envy is also important to Augustine's primal narrative, but he treats it as the cause of Satan's temptation of Eve (*Lit*. *Gen.*, 11:15:18). When mimetic desire turns into rivalry, the victimary mechanism is triggered, and violence is spread by social contagion until it reaches crisis proportions.[84] Against just such a crisis, the Decalogue is important as a corrective. It is a series of proscriptions against desiring (and self-idolatry).[85] From that point on, all humankind inherits the same negative mimeticism accompanied by violence, but they are canalized by scapegoating, rituals, and laws.

Girard appeals to ethology and anthropology for evidence that negative mimeticism permeates the hominization of humankind. Prior to the primal moment when negative mimeticism was awakened in incipient humans, the behavior of prehominid ancestors presumably followed the dominance patterns of other animals. It was the "intensification of mimeticism" coupled with increased brain size that worked together to undermine typical animal dominance patterns.[86] This was responsible for frenzied violence that accelerated the process of hominization. This violence ultimately made social victimage necessary in order to quell the violence. Its solution was archaic violence/sacral violence. In Girard's understanding, "the advent of violence marked the beginning of humanity . . . the man of the Fall, fallen from grace."[87]

Girard's strong emphasis on the social nature of mimesis/original sin poses difficulty for the Augustinian view which was pitched against the social transmission theory of Pelagius. Augustine's position was later enshrined in the Council of Trent's stipulation that original sin was passed on by reproduction and not imitation. But as Schwager astutely observed, modern science suggests these are not mutually exclusive alternatives. There is an abundance of research indicating that the social life of infants begins in the womb. The preborn may have already experience the contagion of mimetic aggression.[88] In addition, evolutionary selection may

have favored the naturally violent over the pacific, virtually eliminating those who would have been inclined to live without negative mimetic desire.

Girard also appeals to empirical evidence to affirm that negative mimesis and original sin are coincident in infancy. At points in his writings, he comments on the rivalrous competition among children and, in one passage, affirms with approval Augustine's similar observation about the hostility in the demeanor of a twin watching his sibling at the breast of their wet nurse.[89] According to Girard, these children had external mediators—adults—and internal mediators—each other. Thus they become rivals. Original sin/negative mimeticism is present at least from birth.[90] But Girard makes a stronger claim that "deeper imitation precedes reflective knowledge, and it absorbs the influence of models in 'quasi-osmotic immediacy.'"[91] This claim squares with the research of Tomatis that indicate a preborn's participation in mimesis begins in the womb with both the preborn's auditory awareness of its surroundings and even more immediate knowledge of its mother's emotional states.[92] More recent studies add weight to this claim by suggesting that epigenetic causes (which include experience and culture) may also ubiquitously affect humans by activating latent genomic functions.[93]

Later, when discussing the relevance of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard admitted that, in that work, he entertained nothing explicitly as original sin. But he also denied that his treatment of mimesis there was irrelevant to the idea. In his own words, one must "take the notion [of mimesis found there] as far as you can . . . [to] go through the ceiling, as it were, and discover what amounts to original sin."[94] Without repeating the discussion of Girard's notion of desire, two points should be emphasized. First, the idolatry that Girard described in highly mimetic fictional characters—and its accompanying nihilification—is recognized by Augustine as a universal affliction of humans, though Augustine gives it an ontological inflection. Second, what Girard says in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* about the individuality of desire is similar to what Augustine described as the sinful behavior of the *outer* human.[95]

Finally, though Girard often spoke as if negative mimeticism was deterministic, he explicitly denied this, a denial which echoes Augustine's view that the sinful orientation of the will did not compromise freedom of

choice (*Free Choice*, 1:16:116–118; 3:17:168–169; 3:20:177–179, 188–199; 3:22:222–224*;* see also *On Grace and Free Choice*). Though negative mimesis is present in all humans, the individual and corporate choices they make do not necessarily result in scapegoating.[96] Even so, negative mimeticism—like original sin—is inescapable. Girard's recognition of this inescapability bears an analogy with the inescapability of what Thomas Aquinas and some subsequent theologians identify with original sin (before baptism) and the *fomes* of sin ("tinder"/residual complexes of desire) afterward.[97] Both negative mimeticism and the *fomes* are ways of accounting for the bad behavior of Christians after baptism and conversion.

Complementarity in the Thought of Augustine and Girard

Girard's familiarity with Augustine came through a limited number of texts, and by intellectual osmosis of Augustinian ideas saturating the Western philosophical and theological traditions.[98] Despite their differences, their descriptions of desire are mutually reinforcing, each providing a supplement to the other, especially in the way each treats desire and the nihility of being.

Augustine's theology has a cosmic scope, and its data ranges across human experience and the disciplinary spectrum of his time. In comparison, the data for Girard's thought is broad, but principally focused on comparative literature, the Judeo-Christian scriptures, history, and to a lesser extent anthropology and human origins. Augustine has an interest *in* and makes use *of* philosophical ontology and late antique metaphysics, while, at times, Girard disparages formal metaphysics and generally sets himself against the philosophical trends of the twentieth century. Augustine's purpose is to make a theology of over-arching connections. Although Girard often makes connections, his focus on data is narrower, more schematic, and less messy. His principal purpose is to identify the structures of desire that are present in all human experience.[99] Augustine's descriptions of human desire, though sometimes from the side of the subject's experience, are mostly treated objectively, whereas Girard is primarily interested in the subjective experience of human desire and especially as it exists *interdividually*.[100]

Whereas Augustine describes the primal scene of original sin without explaining much about the mechanics of transmission, Girard is not much interested in the primal origin of desire but says a great deal about its contagious transmission. Though both theorize it differently, both agree that (something like) mimetic desire is present in the early stages of infancy. Girard describes the mimetic operations of this desire, *after* its origination.[101] A Girardian model of desire's propagation helps Augustine's Christianized Neoplatonism, just as Girard's model of desire's propagation discovers a first moment and origin in Augustine's idea of a primal fall from being.[102]

Though Augustine had treated postlapsarian desire in terms of dissatisfaction with the object, Girard engages in a trenchant analysis of the social dynamics of desire, supplying a theory of how its triangular structure configures incitement and development. Again, neither approach cancels the other; each works together.

What Augustine sees as a properly ordered relationship to God, Girard calls "vertical transcendency." What Augustine sees as a disordered relationship to God, Girard terms "deviated transcendency." Though Augustine would deny any variety of transcendence other than in relationship to God, he is not at loggerheads with Girard, who sees it as a form of deluded transcendency. Both would deny the sufficiency of any created object. Both recognize nihility in deviated transcendence.

Girard's experientially grounded diagnosis is the subjective face to Augustine's ontological approach emphasizing categories of being. For Augustine, negative desire is consequent on a diminishment of human nature at the level of the species being. Girard's language is closer to the existentialists. Writing with twentieth century nihilism as his backdrop, he charts the symptoms of the delusion that humans can find satisfaction by succumbing to the desires of others.

Girard's emphasis on the interdividuality of desire seems to threaten the Augustinian notion of human individuality. But this is a matter of appearance. Girard's notion of interdividuality, supplemented by Augustine's ontology, does not preclude individuality as a metaphysical property. Rather, in showing how thoroughly shared human desire is, it opens the possibility of a positive de-differentiation of self and other at the level of human species being. Both Augustine and Girard agree that it is not in a falsely constructed otherness—in the outer human or the fully

autonomous self—that one will discover desire's cure. Both are illusions that lead to a deficit of being.

Though most of Girard's writings were dedicated to describing the nature of negative mimesis and its violent consequences, Augustine—philosopher, theologian, and bishop—wrote voluminously about the medicine for desire. Though Girard prefers to treat the consequences of deviated transcendency with fewer references to Christian hamartiology—except in terms of violence—Augustine's pastoral concern for enumerating sinful consequences is not unappreciated by Girard. Finally, there is truth in the claim by some Girardians that Girard's diagnosis of the human condition is detachable from *his* claim that Christianity is its "cure." About this cure, however, Girard and Augustine speak unequivocally with the same voice. They agree that the recognition of the mechanism of original sin is not a redemption from it. Though there from the beginning, the option to choose God as the object of desire is not the chosen one. The not choosing God is the universal situation of humankind, *one that can only be overcome by conversion through Christ*.[103] And this conviction they share by virtue of their respective conversion experiences and a common membership. As Girard puts it: "Everything that Christ conquered by escaping the world and its violence without taking part in it, He offers to all human beings who are willing to be raised up by his grace. Christ's act reestablishes the connection between God and human beings that had been damaged by original sin."[104]

NOTES

1. Gabriel Marcel, "On the Ontological Mystery," in *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (New York: Citadel, 1971 [1947]), 12.

2. Ibid., 30.

3. Ibid., 13. Against Sartre's positive valorization of nothingness, Marcel proposes *creative fidelity* as its cure. Ontological need can only be met by an active perpetuation and constant renewal of presence, a reciprocal relationship between subjects, where their giving of self to one another exceeds their being as objects, a gift and receiving of self that is selfless, an active permeability to and interpenetration of and with others, these others being God and fellow humans. See Marcel, "On the Ontological Mystery," 34–46.

4. René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 134.

5. René Girard, Laurent Linneuil, and Abbé de Tanoüarn, "Facing the Devil's Test: The Truth according to René Girard," trans. Andreas Wilmes and David Dawson, *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, no. 2 (2017): 204–19, https://doi.org/10.22618/TP.PJCV.20171.2.245014.

6. In this paper, no long passages are quoted in Latin. The contained Latin phrases follow the Migne edition of Augustine's works; see Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vols. 32–47 (Paris, 1857–1866). The English translation of Latin phrases are either those of the cited authors, my own, or (in rare cases) follow the translations in Paulist Press's Ancient Christian Writers Series Augustine volumes. The only exception to this practice is the long citation from *The Confessions*, which is drawn from Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City, 2001). The numbers in the parenthetical citations of Augustine's works follow a standard convention. However, instead of using the brief abbreviations recommended by the Augustinian Institute, I have chosen to use longer complete-word abbreviations to help the general reader identify the source. These make the titles of the abbreviated works more readily identifiable than those often used by scholars.

7. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvone Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 61, 156, 241.

8. It is a "pure and true love . . . enriched by science and embellished by virtue" joined with philosophical understanding that enables the soul to "flee death" and "enjoy a beatific life" (Augustine, *On Order*, 1:8:24). See: Emilie Zum Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness*, trans. Ruth Namad (New York: Paragon House, 1988 [1978]), 15.

9. Brunn, *St. Augustine*, 14.

10. Compare this to Augustine in *On the Beatific Life* (2:8), where he describes nothingness (an aspect of existence) as "flowing, dissolving, melting, and—so to speak—perpetually perishing."

11. The *Libri Platonicorum* (*Platonic Books*) are mentioned by Augustine in his *Confessions* as what he was reading in Milan during his professorship there. These were Marius Victorinus's Latin translations of (then) recent Neoplatonic writers. Contained in these books were works of Plotinus and Porphyry, but whether there were other authors cannot be determined with probability. Even so, Augustine was eclectic in his borrowings. Not simply a Platonist, he was familiar with Stoic epistemology and Neo-Pythagoreanism. See Pier Franco Beatrice, "Quosdam Platonicorum Libros: The Platonic Readings of Augustine in Milan," *Vigiliae Christianae* 43, no. 2 (September 1989): 248–81.

12. The citations follow Kenneth Guthrie's idiosyncratic translation of *Pros ta Noēta Aphorismoi*, a title better rendered *Definitions to the* [*Realm of the*] *Intelligible*. The aphorisms are numbered according to Guthrie's translation which follows Bouillet's arrangement, not that of E. Lamberz. Augustine's relation to Porphyry is complex and only imperfectly established by scholars. Both his doctrine of the Trinity and his doctrine of original sin rely upon a Porphyrian reinterpretation of the Aristotelian *Categories*. His familiarity with Aristotle, and the *Categories* in particular, allow him in the *Confessions* (4:15:28) to pronounce: "I read it by myself and understood it. . . . [W]hen I discussed it with others," they "scarcely understood it and could tell me no more about it than I had acquired in the reading of it by myself alone . . . For the book appeared to me to speak plainly enough." In *On the Trinity*, to take another example, Augustine "moves" the category of relation from the list of the nine accidents over to the side of substance, a bold move that allows him to avoid the Scylla of Modalism, on one hand, and the Charybdis of Tritheism, on the other. In his writings on original sin, he characterizes this human malady according to the Porphyrian notion of inseparable accident.

13. Brunn, *St. Augustine*, 37–78.

14. Ibid., 10.

15. Aristotle, in the *Categories*, says that "having" (*echein*) can mean seven things, but it is the third sense that is implied: an extrinsic belonging characterized by contact with something (*Categories*, 15:21–23). To describe God and humankind as quality and accident, or according to any of the other meanings, would be impious. Unfortunately, Porphyry's *On Aristotle's Categories* is missing the discussion of having (*Aristotle Categories*, 142:17).

16. In *On Aristotle Categories* (77:15–36), Porphyry supplies seven senses of "in," but only two fit here. God is *in* humans as a goal (*telos*) such as happiness is in humans; humans are *in* God as that which is controlled by God (77:30–35). "With" and "without" presumably fall under the category of relations; they are not to be taken in a crudely spatial sense. God is *with* everything, ordering things, but some humans are *without* God, meaning not in a spiritual relation to him, especially as they embody nihility (*Order*, 2:2:7:23). "With" functions, here, as a non-symmetric relation.

17. Brunn, *St. Augustine*, 13.

18. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 59, 61, 157–58, 287.

19. Ibid., 164–65.

20. Ibid., 274.

21. Ibid., 165.

22. Girard makes it clear that the total renunciation of mimetic desire, especially if that renunciation is suicidal, is not a preferred path to liberation. He rightly characterizes Buddhism as proposing this path, but his assertion needs to be nuanced. Buddhists, like Girard, reject the seeking of Kirillov's brand of nothingness, which has nothing in common with śūnyatā. Buddhist enlightenment is not achieved egotistically. See Rebecca Adams and René Girard, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice: A Conversation with René Girard," *Religion & Literature* 25, no. 2 (1993): 24 and Girard, *Deceit Desire, and the Novel*, 274–79.

23. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 278.

24. Ibid., 268, 275–79.

25. Ibid., 60, 89, 254.

26. Ibid., 157.

27. Timo Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 37.

28. Ibid., 37–58. For a contemporary discussion of the meaning of concupiscence in the theology of Karl Rahner, see the insightful essay by Nikolaus Wandinger, "'Concupiscence' and 'Mimetic Desire': A Dialogue Between K. Rahner and R. Girard," *Contagion* 11 (Spring 2004): 146–60.

29. John Burnaby originally argued that Augustine's treatment of "*caritas*," "*dilectio*," "*amor*," and the related "*desiderium*" was more complex than Anders Nygren, in *Agape and Eros*, had considered. More recently, the complexity of Augustine's use of words related to desire and love has been confirmed by Timo Nisula in a careful lexical study. See John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study in the Religion of St. Augustine* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007 [1938]), 85–110; Nisula, *Concupiscence*, 42, and throughout.

30. Nisula, *Concupiscence*, 37–58.

31. Ibid., 35.

32. Ibid., 37, 39.

33. Ibid., 35–36.

34. Ibid., 38–39. As Nisula observes, the sexual connotation of concupiscence (*concupiscentia*) is likely derivative through its rendering of the Greek "*epithumia*" in the *koinē* New Testament. It would have been natural for Augustine, Neoplatonist that he was, to have associated concupiscence with Plato's description of the lowest soul-center in the *Republic*, the *epithumetikon*, the one associated with carnal desires.

35. Ibid., 57.

36. Ibid., 50.

37. Ibid., 168, 177.

38. The origin of Augustine's three *kinds* of concupiscence is likely the three "soul-centers" in Plato's *Republic* (4:11:435e–4:18:444e; 9:7:580d–9:581a). The concupiscence of the body corresponds to the *epithumetikon*, the concupiscence of the will to the *thumoiedes*, and the concupiscence of the eyes to the *logistikon*. The correspondences between the first two kinds of concupiscence are obvious enough, but how does concupiscence of the eyes correspond to the *logistikon*? This correspondence apparently obtains because Augustine, following Neoplatonic thinking, identifies the *logistikon* with philosophical thought and the contemplation of God. Concupiscence of the "eyes" is a degradation of ordered intellection in favor of fascination by sinful spectacle or the misuse of intellectual goods for selfish or evil ends. Also, Augustine's claim that pride (the emblem of deviated willfulness) is the common root of all three probably has it origin in the way Plato sees the willful or spirited part allying itself with the reason (for good) or with the desiring part (for evil). For Augustine, however, the will's supporting the reason is not sufficient to make the acts good because will, in itself, may be evil. Thus, for each variety of concupiscence, there is a disordering of one of the proper orientations of the soul. The measure of this disorientation is the Christian (but not the Neoplatonic) virtues, though there are affinities between the two. An evil will knots the three concupiscences together. This triple root also has affinities with the rabbis' discussion of the triple root of sin (idolatry, murder, adultery) (*Talmud Bavli*, Sanhedrin 74a, Yoma 85a).

39. Nisula, *Concupiscence*, 168, 177.

40. Charlton Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1969 [1879]), 556b–556c.

41. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, 108b.

42. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, 579c. But more germane is Thomas Aquinas's gloss (in the *Summa Theologiae*) on Augustine's use of the word "*dilectio*." See *Summa Theologiae* (*ST*) 1a2ae, q. 26; 2a2ae, q. 44, a. 3, resp.

43. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, 292c.

44. See the especially good discussion of *caritas* in Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbour in St. Augustine* (Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993). For love of neighbor, see pages 215–48, and for love of God *and* neighbor see pages 249–30. In this book, Canning puts to rest Nygren's distortions of Augustine's understanding of *caritas*.

45. Some scholars, like Anders Nygren, have made the claim that Augustine's directive to use one's neighbors to attain one's salvation is itself utilitarian. However, as Canning has shown, this utilitarian interpretation of Augustine is incorrect. If one *selflessly* treats a neighbor as *another self*, then if there be any instrumentality at all, it is no different than the reflexive instrumentality of one's own person deployed to achieve a good end for oneself.

46. To explore the complexity of the Augustinian notion of desire, discussions of the Latin terms mentioned above can be found in the landmark *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. Cornelius Mayer, et al., 5 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 1987–2022).

47. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 1–3.

48. Ibid., 62, 82, 90.

49. Ibid., 96–97, 99.

50. Adams, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice," 24.

51. "Only mimetic desire can be free, can be genuine desire, human desire, because it must choose a model more than the object itself. Mimetic desire is what makes us human, what makes possible for us the breakout from routinely animalistic appetites, and constructs our own, albeit inevitably unstable, identities. It is this very mobility of desire, its mimetic nature, and this very instability of our identities, that makes us capable of adaptation, that gives the possibility to learn and

to evolve." René Girard, with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London: Continuum, 2010), 42.

52. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 77.

53. René Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, trans. James G. Williams (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 43.

54. This is a representative simplification of the typology of mimetic outcomes that Girard charts in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*.

55. "Meontic," here, is not to be confused with the characterization by Pseudo-Dionysius, and others, that God is positively beyond being. The adjective "negative" implies (in my use, here) a more literal interpretation of the word: as "not-being, nonbeing, or nihility."

56. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 80.

57. Ibid., 283.

58. Ibid., 87.

59. Girard, in a few places, gives the name "obstacle addiction" to this process of nihilification, a process that is both progressive and repetitive, and he proposes it as a better explanation for the Freudian notion of the death wish. (*Resurrection from the Underground*, 81). What Girard has in mind, *contra Freud*, is succinctly expressed in *Things Hidden* (409–15). Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, describes the relevant phenomena as follows: "We have come across people all of whose relationships have the same outcome: such as the benefactor who is abandoned in anger after a time by each of his [very different] protégés . . . and thus who thus seems to be doomed to taste all the bitterness of ingratitude; or a man whose friendships all end in betrayal . . . *or the man who . . . in the course of life raises someone else into a position of great private or public authority and then, after a certain interval, himself upsets that authority and replaces it by a new one*; or, again, whose love affairs . . . passes through the same phases and reaches the same conclusion." Responding to Freud's observations, Girard explains obstacle addiction in this way: "All the phenomena described by Freud . . . can be reduced to the process . . . of mimetic rivalry, with the model first metamorphosing into an idol and then turning into an obstacle and a hateful persecutor, which reinforces his sacred status. . . . The subject who is not able to decide . . . the object that he should desire relies on the desire of another person. And he automatically transforms the model desire into a desire that opposes and frustrates his own. Because he does not understand the automatic character of the rivalry, the imitator . . . converts the fact of being opposed . . . into the major stimulant of his desire [and] . . . he proceeds to inject more and more violence into his desire. To identify this tendency is to recognize that . . . desire tends toward death, both the death of the model and the obstacle (murder) and the death of the subject . . . (self-destruction and suicide)." (*Things Hidden*, 411, 413). Girard describes this process of obstacle addiction as "'unenlightened self-enslavement'" because it works, mechanically, toward misfortune and a kind of hell on earth (*Resurrection from the Underground*, 78–82). For a discussion of how this obstacle addiction is manifest in the development of modern Western philosophy, see Andreas Wilmes, "Demystifying the Negative: René Girard's Critique of the Humanization of Nothingness," *Forum Philosophicum* 24, no. 1 (2019) : 91–126. https://doi.org/10.35765/forphil.2019.2401.04.

60. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 279–282.

61. On this point, Girard and Augustine agree, but only in part, about the ultimate cause of suicide. Both Augustine and Girard see it as seeking the cessation of the desire. For Augustine, this is a perverse attempt to realize a stability that can only be found in God, the cause being the desire for misfortune to cease. For Girard, cessation of desire is sought, but so is the annihilation of self as a consummate act of freedom. They agree, however, that an act of perverse and irrational evil (surd

evil) is possible. All intentional choices of evil are perverse imitations and inversions of the quest for being.

62. Adams, "Violence, Difference, Sacrifice," 25.

63. Ibid., 23.

64. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversation with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 133–34.

65. René Girard, *Mimesis and Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 267.

66. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 109.

67. Ibid., 28. See also Girard, *Things Hidden*, 214; Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 214–17, 222–23; Gianni Vattimo and René Girard, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 46–47.

68. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 198.

69. Brunn, *St. Augustine*, 22.

70. Augustine thinks of human nature in one of four ways: (1) as referring to the essential properties of a being (unchangeable), (2) as referring to both essential and accidental properties of a being, together (changeable with respect to the accidents), (3) as referring to the accidents of human nature before the fall, (4) as referring to the accidents of human nature after the fall. "Nature" usually refers to 2, 3, 4, throughout this essay, but context determines meaning.

71. Both acts also unite original and actual sin. Adam and Eve's sin is both. Augustine's sin is an actual sin conditioned by the inheritance of original sin.

72. Brunn, *St. Augustine*, 38–40.

73. On inseparable accident and habit, see Porphyry (*Isagoge*, 21:5–22:15; *Aristotle Categories*, 131:15–36). On second nature, see Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, 1369b6, 1370a7) and Cicero (*End*, 5:25:74). Also see: John M. Rist, *Augustine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 138, 175, 178, 183, 215.

74. Augustine's formula for original sin is that all humans are "not able not to sin." This is not necessarily to be read as "all human actions are sins," but it indicates all humans *will* sin. Augustine makes a distinction between will and choice, making will the faculty or power and choice the individual action. To say that humans have a defective will is not to say that every single choice is evil, but that every human will do evil. Thus, humans have freedom of choice but not freedom of will.

75. This is connected to Augustine's understanding of Adam's status. Not allowing a Platonic form of humanity, Augustine intimates that Adam was both universal human and particular historical human. His disobedience effected a reflexive alteration of his nature, a crippling of will, intellect, and body tantamount to a nihilification. This was transmitted to his progeny. He is short on details about how exactly the transmission of this defect—original sin—occurs. See Robert J. O'Connell, *The Origin of the Soul in Augustine's Later Works* (New York: Fordham, 1987), 300–315, 337–350.

76. This anticipates Girard's notion of "obstacle addiction." See the exposition below.

77. René Girard and Maria Stella Barberi, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 90–91.

78. Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013, 37.

79. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 198–99.

80. René Girard, *A Theater of Envy* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2004), 324.

81. In the *On the Trinity*, 12:3:17, Augustine describes the three stages of a sinful act: the temptation *of* the thought, satisfaction *in* the thought, and consent in action. Thomas Aquinas (*ST*, 2.1. q. 72. a. 7) encapsulates Augustine's treatment as carnality baiting the individual with the idea, satisfaction in the pleasure of the idea, and consent to the idea in deed.

82. Girard, *When These Things Begin*, 31.

83. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 66.

84. Ibid., 66. Also Girard, *To Double Business Bound*, 89.

85. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 62–63.

86. Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, 90.

87. Ibid., 90–91.

88. Raymund Schwager, *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation*, trans. James Williams (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2006), 39.

89. Girard and Girardians cite a passage in Augustine's *Confessions* (1:7:11) as evidence that Augustine was aware of a phenomenon that gives support to both mimetic theory and original sin: "The only innocent feature in babies is the weakness of their frames; the minds of infants are far from innocent. I have watched and experienced for myself the jealousy of a small child: he could not even speak, yet he glared with livid fury at his fellow-nursling. Everyone has seen this. Mothers and nurses claim to have some means of their own to charm away such behavior. Is this to be regarded as innocence, this refusal to tolerate a rival for a richly abundant fountain of milk, at a time when the other child stands in greatest need of it and depends for its very life on this food alone? Behavior of this kind is cheerfully condoned, however, not because it is trivial or of small account, but because everyone knows that it will fade away as the baby grows up. This is clear from the fact that those same actions are by no means calmly tolerated if detected in anyone of more mature years." Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1997), 46. See also Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 61, and Girard, Linneuil, and Tanoüarn "Facing the Devil's Test," 213.

90. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 61.

91. Schwager, *Banished from Eden*, 118.

92. Ibid.

93. Epigenetics is the new science of how environment influences the expression of portions of the genome. This activation is mediated through the epigenome (processes which include DNA methylation, histone modification, non-coding RNA, etc.) "Environment" here includes chemical, nutritional, psychological, and social causes. Some of these effects persist only in a single person or generation. Some are transmissible from parent to child or generation to generation. See Ian Weaver, "4.3 Epigenetics in Psychology," in *Introduction to Psychology*, ed. Jordan A. Cummings and Lee Sanders (Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan Open Press, 2019), 178–92, https://openpress.usask.ca/introductiontopsychology/. Also, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, "Epigenetics and Child Development: How Children's Experiences Affect their Genes," https://developingchild.harvard.edu/ epigenetics. And Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "What is Epigenetics?," last reviewed August 15, 2022, https://www.cdc.gov/genomics/disease/epigenetics.htm.

94. James Williams, ed., *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 284.

95. Augustine's distinction between the outer human and inner human occurs throughout his works. But it is more complex than the distinction between the animal nature and the soul (as it is sometimes described). Though the outer human is drawn toward the concupiscence of the flesh, the outer human also represents the individual in its selfish individuality, subject to the cupidity of

intellect and will. In contrast, the inner human is that aspect of the person which follows the good will. The latter is that aspect of the person that does not aim at possessing things selfishly but aims toward "inner and higher things" possessed commonly without limitation or envy (*On the Trinity*, 12:3:16). Augustine follows St. Paul's theological anthropology (2 Cor. 4:16, Eph. 3:16, Rom. 7:22–23), where flesh and spirit are not simplistically identified with matter and the soul but represent the worldly versus the spiritual aspects of humans. He further allegorizes the scene of the original sin by associating Adam with higher reason and Eve as lower reason—higher and lower reason being understood common to men and women alike—showing how the lower reason can drag down the higher (*On the Trinity*, 12:3:17–19).

96. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 67.

97. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversation with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 82.

98. See Thomas Ryba, "Girard and Augustine," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion*, ed. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2017), 209–15.

99. Girard, at points through his work, refers to his approach as phenomenological. Augustine's approach is more piecemeal and eclectic as was common among the Church Fathers in late antiquity, though he too has been identified as a proto-phenomenologist. On the Girardian and Augustinian phenomenologies, see Tyler Graham, "St. Augustine's Novelistic Conversion," *Contagion* 5 (1996): 135–54; Thomas Ryba, "The *Magister Internus:* An Augustinian Proto-Phenomenology of Faith as Desire and Teacher," *Analecta Husserliana* 43 (1994): 307–29.

100. The neologisms "interdividual/interdividually" first surface throughout *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* in discussions between René Girard, Jean-Michel Oughourlian, and Guy Lefort. Oughourlian describes this notion in *The Genesis of Desire* a substitute for the word "individual." The individual, "conceived as a self-contained and self-enclosed entity that can find the origin of its identity and freedom in itself," is a misapprehension. The "true psychological reality is not situated within the individual but lies in the mysterious transparency of the relation between two persons. And this psychological relationship, this constant interaction, is entirely mimetic. It is characterized by the reciprocal movement of imitation and suggestion passing from one person to the other, a symmetrical movement that we forge and modify unceasingly. Our desire, and thus our self, forms in that 'between,' in that relation; the self is not something hidden away . . . fortified within itself, but the product of a continuous process of creation taking place at the crossroads of our encounters. . . . From the point of view of a mimetic approach, the most authentic 'self' would be one that recognizes the mimetic nature of its desire and thereby frees itself from the deceptive individualism that impedes understanding of oneself, of others, and of their relations." Recognition is certainly the first step, but Girard sees the cure as more than recognition. Also important is the observation made by Girard in *Things Hidden* that accelerated reciprocity may become so intense as to blur the line between self and other, so that the ego becomes entirely indistinguishable from the other. This is an effect at the level of the *interindividual* (35). See Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *The Genesis of Desire*, trans. Eugene Webb (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 34.

101. This is not to suggest that he or his associates were unconcerned about the origin of desire. In *Evolution and Conversion* (198), Girard, in answer to the question "Is the mimetic mechanism the original sin?," answers "Yes, of course. The original sin is the bad use of mimesis, and the mimetic mechanism is the actual consequence of this use at the collective level." See also Raymund Schwager, *Banished from Eden: Original Sin and Evolutionary Theory in the Drama of Salvation*, trans. James Williams (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2007 [1997]).

102. For a contemporary theology of original sin, based in mimetic theory, with a treatment of Augustine, see James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes* (New York:

Crossroad, 1998), 289–304. For a study of the connections between the Girardian notion of desire, original sin, and positive mimesis in the thought of contemporary Girardians, see Petra Steinmair-Pösel, "Original Sin, Positive Mimesis," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion*, ed. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2017), 185–92.

103. Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, Joel Hodge, and Mathias Moosbruggerer, eds., *René Girard and Raymund Schwager: Correspondence, 1974–1991*, trans. Chris Fleming and Shelah Trefle Hidden (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 179–85.

104. Girard, *When These Things Begin*, 114–15. For a broader treatment of the similarities and dependencies between Girard's and Augustine's thought, see Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. Gabriel Borrud (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013).

Niccolò Machiavelli

Harald Wydra

WHILE RENÉ GIRARD WROTE ON PHILOSOPHERS LIKE NIETZSCHE, Heidegger, or Hegel (to mention but a few), he has been entirely silent about the Florentine political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli. This lack of engagement appears self-evident at first glance. Machiavelli (1469–1527) lived most of his life in late Renaissance Florence and his work is essentially an extensive commentary on Florence's and Italy's deep internal regime crisis and foreign threat. His early adulthood was marked by turbulent times. The death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492 was followed by the establishment of a theocratic regime by the religious leader Fra Savonarola and by increased external and internal instability. Machiavelli later would characterize Savonarala as the "unarmed prophet" who failed to secure his rule once the masses deserted him. After Savonarola's execution in 1498, Machiavelli obtained a position in the Florentine government. While his position was subordinate to the council of the Signoria, it had important competences regarding warfare and foreign affairs. Until 1512, he had opportunities to go on several dozen diplomatic missions to Rome, France, or Germany. Being heavily involved in matters of military defense he organized and led the militia that in 1509 reconquered Pisa. Due to the mounting pressure from the Papal States and military defeat, Florence would see the return of the Medici family to power in 1512, which would force Machiavelli into retirement. His writings are both systematic and historical, both regarding the political history of Florence and the origins of republican order in the Roman Republic.

Given Machiavelli's parochialism one might see his work as diametrically opposed to Girard's emphasis on the ubiquity of mimetic desire and the timeless workings of the scapegoat mechanism. Nevertheless, there are significant elective affinities. Girard's trajectory started as a historian but—dissatisfied with his education in France—made him pursue an academic career abroad in the United States, where he specialized in comparative literature. Although within the academic canon of his native France Girard has often been referred to as a philosopher, he defined himself as a "classical anthropologist."[1] The French scholar himself claimed that "readers do not realize how unphilosophical I am, and the fact that I have been guided by the idea of contributing to a real science of man, or rather a science of human relationships, always starting from actual and real human relationships, moving away from the 'myth' of the all-powerful subject, which is the source of most of our impotence."[2] He finds an ally in Machiavelli, whose political theory grounded political action not in virtual realities such as the imagination of how life should be. Rejecting speculative thought experiments about human nature, Machiavelli claimed to pursue the effective truth (*verità effetuale*) of the matter rather than "the imaginary republics and monarchies that have never been seen or have been known to exist."[3] Accordingly, the Florentine professed the keenest interest in the knowledge of the actions of great men.[4] Relying on historical sources from ancient history but also using the practitioner's eye of contemporary empirical observation, Machiavelli's famous treatise *The Prince* (*Il Principe*) aimed to understand recurrent patterns that yield comparative insights into regularities in structures of government. In this "*discorrere e regolare i governi de principi*," there is the aim to find the things that are worthy of imitation and those that are not. Ultimately, he claimed that during his fifteen years of diplomatic activity he was busy in the "art of statecraft" (*arte dello stato*).

Surely, the Florentine's concern for statecraft and power diverges significantly from Girard's focus on the anthropological constants of mimetic desire and sacrifice. As political theorist Roberto Farneti has argued, "the phenomenon of power, the central focus of a tradition of political thinking that goes from Machiavelli to Foucault, is marginal in Girard, according to whom power is normally exercised within a framework of stipulation (the 'degree') designed to contain mimetic exposure and

escalation."[5] Yet, both are undeniably thinkers of violence. Sacrificial violence and the scapegoat victim are cornerstones of Girard's fundamental anthropology. Confronted with regime instability and external war, Machiavelli engaged with an "economy of violence."[6] Structures of power could only achieve a degree of stability if the authorities would master the measure, degree, and meaning of violence.[7] As he put it: "For it is the man who uses violence to spoil things, not the man who uses it to mend them, that is blameworthy."[8] A state in charge of legal institutions and prohibition will not suffer from intrusion from outside.[9]

Both thinkers doubt that philosophical key concepts such as freedom, autonomy, and reason can uncover the real basis of conflict and order. Indeed, Friedrich Nietzsche considered Machiavelli's *Prince*, together with Thucydides, as his "cure from all Platonism. These thinkers are most germane in their unconditional will not to fool themselves and to see reason in reality, *not* in 'reason,' still less in 'morality.'"[10] It is perhaps this skepticism with regard to autonomy and reason that has exposed both thinkers to vehement controversy and rejection. Anthropologists regard Girard as an armchair scholar with a deficit of ethnographic fieldwork, while philosophers resent his focus on what they see as a childish desire to imitate others. Although Machiavelli's prose is clear, crisp, and almost always sober, the polarization regarding his work seems unparalleled. As Isaiah Berlin once observed: "What other thinker has presented so many facets to the students of his ideas? What other writer—and not even a recognised philosopher—has caused his readers to disagree about his purposes so deeply and so widely?"[11] His "foes" are convinced of his amorality with which he transformed ancient meanings of virtue and justice as desired attributes of leaders. They would classify Machiavelli, following Leo Strauss, as a "teacher of evil."[12] His "friends" would come to his defense by alleging that his aim would be the perfection of human intelligence in a republican order made possible by one passion alone—that is, by love of country.[13]

Similarly, imitation—beyond its focus on representation—can produce appropriative mimesis, which becomes not only effective in education and culture but also regarding the possession of property and acquisition of power. The mimetics of desire are conditional on the dramatic situation of late fifteenth century Italy, which for Machiavelli was the "seat of

variability" (*sedia della variazione*).[14] The cycle of constitutions exposed in the *Discourses* (I.2) points to a cyclical recurrence of situations of crisis. This cyclical understanding of time is not at odds with the acute sense for pulsating change and contingency. One of the most well-known chapters of *The Prince* describes historical contingency in the metaphor of *fortuna* as a wild torrent, whose impetuosity can never be fully controlled.[15] In plain language, Italy was without dikes and dams, leaving all power to *fortuna*. For Machiavelli, political reality is broken in the microcosm of factional strife, self-interested tactics, and glorious ambitions. The common good therefore cannot be related to ideas of truth or reason. Rather, it is to be retrieved from within such appearances and illusions. The diversity of desires will be the best guarantee for the respect of the laws, and some sense of civic religion that every citizen would share. Still, without sacrifice and the sacred, no durable order can be imagined. I shall structure this chapter by first engaging with Machiavelli's anthropology of desire, which sets the stage for mimetic rivalry as fundamental for order. I shall then develop the foundations of sacrificial rationality in Machiavelli's work before defending the argument that, much like Girard's work, Machiavelli's political theory requires an existential understanding.

Machiavelli's Spheres of Desire

Machiavelli shares Girard's skepticism as to the autonomy of human beings. He insists that political rationality—be it in principalities or republics—is mediated by abundant desires that cannot be fulfilled, thus causing envy and discontent. In spite of posterity's fascination with *The Prince*, Machiavelli's *opus magnus* is actually the *Discourses*, certainly the most important text of political thought ever written in the Italian language.[16] Divided into three books, the *Discorsi sopra la prime deca di Tito Livio* contain a fully-fledged theory of imitation,[17] which he vindicates as his original contribution in the prefaces A and B to the first book and which "is the criterion and the seal"[18] of the second book. In the second preface to the first book, he emphatically states that he wants to save people from the error of assuming that imitation is not only difficult but impossible.[19] As Gennaro Sasso argued, "In reality, it was a deeply passionate bond that is expressed in Machiavelli's theory of imitation."[20]

In the preface to the first book of the *Discourses*, the Florentine insists not only on the feasibility but also the necessity to imitate the statecraft of leaders and the virtue of citizens of the ancient Roman Republic. Imitation of Greek and Roman antiquity was not only a very important tool for artists and writers in Renaissance Italy, but it was probably the norm.[21] Not surprisingly, the theme of imitation is recurrent in Machiavelli's work. At face value, imitation is widely embedded in the *Rinascimento dell'Antichità* and thus focused on the functional, representative, and historical aspects. Moreover, imitation stands forth in its positive connotations and its pedagogic-didactic function by presenting the greatest examples to be imitated.[22] The readership is invited to participate as an active "virtuous" reader-ruler. Imitation of ancient origins is wanting, especially because of the lack of knowledge. This preface draws a distinction implicit in *The Prince* between the humanist/dilettante, the merely verbal imitator, and the true reader and active imitator. The result of this distinction is to lump Machiavelli together "with his ideal hero and his ideal reader, active imitators all."[23]

Although the distant values and virtues of the Roman past seem unattainable, Machiavelli defends the possibility of coincidence and identity of different epochs.[24] "Anyone who studies current and ancient affairs will easily recognize that the same desires and humours exist and have always existed in all cities and among all peoples. Thus, it is an easy matter for anyone who examines past events carefully to foresee future events in every republic and to apply the remedies that the ancients employed, or if old remedies cannot be found, to think of new ones based upon the similarity of circumstances."[25] Machiavelli saw clearly that modes of experience repeat themselves structurally; otherwise history would not be conceivable. The real changes are much less significant than the subjectively experienced surprises of those concerned actually may suggest. Because he sees the evolution of human history as cyclical, not as progressive, imitation can bridge past and present. This claim is underpinned by the suggestion that fundamental structures are driven by repetition, as "birth, life, and death of people occur since ever according to the same laws."[26]

Machiavelli offers no less than a mimetic anthropology in which conceptions of "pre-rational" behavior such as desire, imitation, and sacrifice are constitutive for his interest in political order as a condition of

the economy of violence. Subscribing to the cyclical nature of time and repetition, he thinks that "all the things of this world in every era have their counterparts in ancient times. This occurs since these actions are carried out by men who have and have always had the same passions, which, of necessity, must give rise to the same results."[27] There are, anthropologically speaking, permanent and invariable desires and passions that condition potential single histories. As Anthony J. Parel put it: "First of all, political humors refer to desires and appetites natural to a social group. Desires are prerational in that their satisfaction is a matter of necessity rather than choice. Reason is not so much a restraint upon them as a stimulant, since the political satisfaction of these desires is what constitutes the *summum bonum* of Machiavellian politics. Desires are not acquired, as such; they are constitutive."[28]

What does this theory of desire mean in a world of random movement, fragility, and permanent change? Against the relatively stable political community of legitimate authority, which dominated the Middles Ages, regime instability in Florence translated desires into ambition, rivalry, and eventually, violence:

> For, whenever there is no need for men to fight, they fight for ambition's sake; and so powerful is the sway that ambition exercises over the human heart they never relinquish it, no matter how high they have risen. The reason is that nature has so constituted men that, though all things are objects of desire, not all things are attainable; so that desire always exceeds the power of attainment, with the result that men are ill content with what they possess and their present state brings them little satisfaction. Hence arise the vicissitudes of their fortune. For, since some desire to have more and others are afraid to lose what they have already acquired, enmities and wars are begotten, and this brings about the ruin of one province and the exaltation of its rival.[29]

This analysis of reciprocal desires as generating conflict can be read as an early formulation of mimetic rivalry. The relation between the desires is dynamic, depending on repetition and cyclical movement. The effective truth, according to Machiavelli, is not based on "ideas," be they the idea of necessity, the idea of virtue, or the idea of *fortuna*. Being more radical, Machiavelli underpins these concepts by the claim of an experiential quality. For him, any society is divided; not because necessity or fortune have a nature, rather, there is the opposition of two desires, which are defined through the other. This opposition of desires is central to explaining rivalry within political communities. "Such a principality is obtained either

by the favour of the people or by the favour of the nobles, because in all cities these two distinct humours (*due umori diversi*) are found. The people desire not to be ruled or oppressed by the nobles, and the nobles desire to rule and oppress the people. From these two opposite desires (*dua appetiti diversi*) there are three possible results, a principality, self government, or disorder."[30] Here, the people's desire is to be free, whereas the nobles' desire is to dominate and control. One might therefore consider each of these desires to be possessed by each group, as if they were an expression or attributes of class or collective identity. Yet, the idea of the *due umori diversi* cannot be reduced to an opposition of self-contained collective factions or class interests. Such an understanding of desire as autonomous and specific to a social category would overlook that Machiavelli here focuses on the collective passions that fuel all policy. The different *umori* are not specific to any collective group that vies for influence, power, or rule but to the ways people relate to each other as models. The antagonism between the *due umori diversi*—between the nobles and the people—can therefore be read as the desires of reciprocally imitating subjects whose goals such as possessions and power are always in too short a supply. Desires continually expand; they are never satisfied. By nature, desire is always being transferred to new objects.

Indeed, Machiavelli constantly draws parallels between the human body and the body politic. His theory of humors draws on medical analogies used in Renaissance scientific theory that explained human behavior with reference to the mixture of four different humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.[31] This intertwinement of human body and the sources of political order connects both individual and collective existence. The theory of humors and desires is not a statement about human nature as an immutable trait but rather inserts such desires into the variability of the times. In one of the speeches in the third book of his historical treatise on the *History of Florence*, we read: "Do not impute the old disorders to human nature, but to the times, and since times may change you may hope for better fortune for our city: if better institutions are created."[32] If the citizens in the Roman Republic could venerate the common good, it was because others revered it and no one would desire outlandish and extravagant particular goods. The common good is desired or revered because others revere it. This may be an idealized view, but the crucial point is that we have here the bases of a mimetic anthropology at work.

Across his major works, Machiavelli uses the term "humor" interchangeably with those of "desire" and "appetite," to designate the great and the people.[33] In *The Prince* the balance of the humors will be decisive for the regime type.[34] If that balance turns in favor of the great, then it will be more corrupted. In the *Discourses*, the dynamic conflict of the humors can produce laws favorable to liberty. The humors and desires produce great disunion, which is crucial for unity (I.4). The people's humor makes them better guardians of freedom than the great (I.5), and judicial procedures and laws enable the humors to be "vented" without resorting to private violence (I.7). In essence, Machiavelli considers the enraged (*rabbiosi*) humors an explosive mixture but still favorable to freedom. Yet, such achievements will always remain unstable and variable, as anthropologically, the two desires vary in intensity.

Desires are not stable attributes of actors or groups, but they are mobile and dynamic. Not by chance, humor is used in conjunction with verbs that express uncontrollable motion.[35] In the central third book of the *Florentine Histories* (III.1), Machiavelli refers to this diversity of humors which is the reason for the disturbances and conflicts within a city. He describes the Ciompi revolt between 1378 and 1382 as a paradigmatic case of escalation of internal conflicts. Here, social conflict in Florence would not be restricted to nobility and the people. It would extend to enmities between the people (*popolo*) and the mob (*plebe*). Mimetic theory helps understanding why the opposed factions are not autonomous or self-interested. One faction's desire is mediated by the others. The desire of the people is maintained through the opposition to the opposite desire. As Girard put it: "Mimetic desire is what makes us human, what makes possible for us the breakout from routinely animalistic appetites, and constructs our own, albeit inevitably unstable, identities. It is this very mobility of desire, its mimetic nature, and this very instability of our identities, that makes us capable of adaptation, that gives the possibility to learn and to evolve."[36] Precisely this mobility of desire implies that the differences we see in rivals conceal the identity of desires. As Girard put it regarding rivalry at a global scale: "Everyone now knows that the looming conflict between the United States and China, for example, has nothing to do with a 'clash of civilisations' . . . We always try to see differences where in fact there are none."[37]

The Mimetic Structure of Conflict

Machiavelli's concept of imitation eminently concerns the conflict-generating reciprocity of human desires, notably in relation with the historical experience of crisis and decay.[38] Both in the *History of Florence* and in the *Discourses*, he describes at several neuralgic points the constantly menacing situation of decay, depravity, and corruption. In the preface to the *Florentine Histories*, he writes: "But in Florence the nobles were, first, divided among themselves; then the nobles and the people; and in the end the people and the plebs: and it happened many times that the winning party was divided in two. From such divisions came as many dead, as many exiles, and as many families destroyed as ever occurred in any city in memory."[39] Although Machiavelli makes no explicit mention of the word "crisis," his work shows striking parallels with Girard's concept of undifferentiation. Undifferentiation appears in Machiavelli's work at multiple levels of the political community, often referred to as permissiveness (*licenzia*) or corruption.[40] Machiavelli is a liminal thinker who understands the variability of the times as the levelling of hierarchies, the porosity of boundaries, and the reduction of mediation. When territorial integrity or power are at stake, when identities disintegrate and decadence spreads, then reciprocal acquisitiveness increases. Machiavelli develops these insights by looking at territorial instability and the emergence of mass politics in which crowds become the dominant factor with which leaders have to reckon. Machiavelli's famous interpretation of *fortuna* as a torrent that could be at least partially controlled by building dikes and dams needs to be connected to technological knowledge of his time, notably the inventions by Leonardo da Vinci.[41]

> I compare her to one of those destructive rivers that, when they become enraged, flood the plains, ruin the trees and buildings, raising the earth from one spot and dropping it onto another. Everyone flees before it; everyone yields to its impetus, unable to oppose it in any way. But although rivers are like this, it does not mean that we cannot take precautions with dikes and dams when the weather is calm, so that when they rise up again either the waters will be channelled off or their force will be neither so damaging nor so out of control.[42]

The allegory of dikes and dams makes more sense if the levelling flow of water that floods is read as the conditions when order is being menaced or destroyed. The state is that domain of stability in the fluidity of chaos

produced by the variations in human passion. The land, however, only remains dry insofar as human action has produced the "dikes and dams"—the armies and the laws—which constrain ambition and selfishness both within and without the community.

The pithiest description of undifferentiation is given with regard to Italy's condition as "more enslaved than that of the Hebrews, more oppressed than the Persians, and more scattered than the Athenians; without a head, without order, beaten, despoiled, lacerated, and overrun it had to endure all kinds of destruction."[43] The natural metaphors of fluidity and disorder are complemented by Machiavelli's attention to the breakdown of social compartments and mediation, which has led to the discovery of mass politics. Nearly three centuries before the French Revolution, he recognizes the dissolution of estates and old hierarchies which give way to crowd politics. In *The Prince* we read that "ordinary people (*vulgo*) are always taken in by appearances and by the outcome of an event. And in the world there are only ordinary people; and the few have no place, while the many have a spot on which to lean."[44] There is also a deeper structural level of undifferentiation at work in Machiavelli when he deals with corruption. Where *materia* is not corrupt, tumults, and other scandals do no harm; where it is corrupt, good laws are useless unless one ruler achieves their observation by extreme force.[45] This theme is taken up in the *Discourses* and in the third book of the *Florentine Histories*.[46] The latter deal in their entirety with the corruption of Florence focusing on *licenzia*, which corresponds to a permanent state of political instability or ill health.

Rather than rejecting crowd politics, Machiavelli embraces the potential of the people. Both the people and the prince are ambitious, but Machiavelli thinks that it is more feasible to find remedies for the people's ambition than it is to reign in the ambition of outstanding individuals. Machiavelli therefore emphatically defends the superiority of republics over principalities. He does this in two main ways. Early on in the *Discourses*, we find what may be Machiavelli's most original claim: Discord is not destructive but rather generative of order. The first hypothesis in the *Discourses* holds that the disunion and strife among the patricians and plebeians was the cause of liberty, stability, and power in the Roman Republic;[47] the second is that making the plebeians the guardians of liberty had the unexpected effect of making Rome a strong military power.[48] We

have here a reversal of the traditional thesis according to which the law is based on wisdom, deliberation, and measure, i.e., the curtailing of men's desires. Later, he makes this point precisely when he defends a certain degree of disunity and particularism as beneficial for a republic, as long as it is regulated by prohibitions, institutions, and legality.[49] Indeed, the transition from princely *virtù*, so prominent in *The Prince*, to the idea that republics are more resilient and better suited to realize the common good can be brought back to Machiavelli's idea that the desires of the many can be better "controlled" than those of the few. Already in *The Prince*, Machiavelli had stated that the ruler ought to satisfy the desires of the people. In *The Prince*,[50] we read that the desire of the people is not to be commanded or oppressed, whereas the Prince aims precisely to command and to oppress the people. Under the rule of laws and prohibitions, it is clear that a people accustomed to living under the law would abide by the virtues impressed upon them; they would become stable, prudent, grateful, and reverential to the authority of the law.

Here, Machiavelli presents desires as central to explaining whether citizens achieve freedom or will be subordinated under princely rule. His admiration of the Roman Republic is based on the fact that Roman citizens had disputes, while in his own Florence, they have combats. "In Rome, they changed the state of equality among the citizens to a state of very great inequality, in Florence they led from inequality to a remarkable state of equality."[51] Both passages presumably contradict the *Discourses*,[52] where he claims that the effects of inequality and discord in the Roman Republic lead to liberty and greatness due to military virtue. Conflict in Florence is negative and becomes *licenzia*. Machiavelli himself is aware of the apparent paradox but defends the coherence of his thought.[53] His judgement on civil discord is indeed considered to be coherent by interpreters such as Bock or Sasso. However, explanations so far emphasized coherence insofar as the outcome of conflict was concerned. They paid less attention to the modalities of conflict, notably the interdividual anthropology of mimetic rivalry.

Let us take a closer look at the concepts of equality and inequality, both of which have an ambivalent meaning throughout Machiavelli's work. As mentioned earlier, the first book of the *Discourses* and the third book of the *Florentine Histories* point to the positive effect of inequality in the Roman Republic. By contrast, Florence's most recent history is characterized as

being reduced to a remarkable equality (*mirabile ugualità*). In Florence, the effects of inequality were such that they produced an equality that was detrimental to the community. This refers to the ruin of the nobility and the levelling down of destinies (*pareggiamento delle sorti*). In a similar vein, in the *Discourses*,[54] Machiavelli argues that inequality is harmful, since it is the cause for decay and corruption in a city. "Such corruption and lack of aptitude for liberty arise from inequality in a city; and in order to restore equality it is necessary to use the most extraordinary of means, for which few have the knowledge or the will."[55]

Inequality in the *Discourses* is not to be understood as social or economic but has to be set in relation to the other fellow citizens.[56] The stress here is on refraining from mimetic rivalry with others for the sake of what are commonly desired (somehow "objective") objects in the form of the public good. Similarly, Machiavelli praises the piety and righteousness of Germany's many free cities who abide by laws.[57] This makes them impervious to internal and external enemies. As Pocock argued, inequality refers to "a state of affairs in which some individuals look to the others when they should be looking to the public good and public authority; and equality must be a state of affairs in which all look to the public good alike. Corruption is the rise of factions, of over-powerful citizens, a moral condition affecting the powerful and their dependents with equal corrosiveness; and its origins are purely moral, a change of Roman *costumi* for the worse."[58] The inequality among Roman citizens led to good outcomes because they were depraved to different degrees. Some citizens maintained enough moral force to impose the veneration of the public good. By contrast, for citizens of Florence, the real objects of desire are not the public good but the competition among subjects that are keen on surpassing one another. Machiavelli's devastating assessment of the gentiles (*gentiluomini*) who live off their rents and are idle is telling.[59]

A key reason for the destructive nature of internal conflicts in Florence was that the diversity of humors would lead to progressive divisions not only between the nobles and the people but also among the people themselves. Machiavelli points to one speech by the people (*popolo*) to the nobles to express this: "For the prize they desire to gain by victory is not the glory of having liberated the city but the satisfaction of having overcome others and of having usurped the principality of the city. . . . . Hence orders

and laws are made not for the public but for personal utility; hence wars, pacts, and friendships are decided not for the common glory but for the satisfaction of few."[60]

This presumably paradoxical use of inequality and equality needs to be connected to the concrete situational context. In the *History of Florence* (as well as in the *Discourses*),[61] the term "remarkable equality" carries a different meaning because of the specific decay and crisis (*licenzia*) that held Florence in its grip. As Sasso pointed out rightly, equality and depravity must be the same thing.[62] The permanent crisis of Florence with its depravity (*abiezione*) is not part of a moral discourse in the first place. Such an assumption is corroborated by the parallel use of the same language of depravity and humility both in the *Florentine Histories* and in the discussion of decadence and crisis of Christianity in the *Discourses*.[63] When republics are strong, a state of equality suggests a situation in which humors are somehow bound by the attention toward the public good. Conversely, when the community is in a corrupt state and mimetic rivalry increases, then there will be a downward spiral of levelling. "Thus, it happens that a republic has a longer life and much greater fortune than a principality, because it can more easily adapt itself to the diversity of circumstances than can a prince, through the diversity of the citizens who inhabit it."[64]

The first book of the *Discourses* discusses this endeavor in an ideal-typical way by using historical examples of Rome.[65] Contrasting the corrupt provinces of Italy, Spain, and France with the German provinces, the discussion of the conditions of equality presupposes avoiding conditions of inequality. To maintain equality, Machiavelli endorses maintaining an uncorrupted political entity by avoiding the contagion of bad models: "These republics, where one has maintained the political life uncorrupted, do not bear that any of its citizens be or live as a gentlemen/noble (*gentiluomo*): rather they maintain among themselves a great equality and are very hostile to those lords and gentlemen who are in this province."[66] To avoid the corrupted lifestyle of gentlemen is the precondition of equality. In the *Discourses*,[67] equality refers to the ethical and moral implication of attitudes to life, which are well enshrined and commonly shared orientation toward the public good. He ends the chapter as follows: "Where there is or can be ignited a strong sense for equality there one should establish a free

regime; whereas where great inequality reigns, there should be established a monarchy; otherwise one builds a work without peace and duration."[68]

Acknowledging the importance of interests for the stability of a republic, Machiavelli praised the Roman Republic for having managed to channel the energies of factional struggles into better laws and greater liberties. His famous claim that the unity of the Roman Republic rested on conflicting interests, however, created another dilemma. If institutions of republican freedom required divisions of particular interests among citizens, what could actually transcend such interest politics? What could bind the masses together and, by some form of legitimation, tame the dynamics of desire to endanger stability and balance? This intriguing question leads us to the pivotal status of sacrifice and the sacred.

Machiavelli's Religion of Sacrifice

The central dimension proposed by mimetic theory is expressed by Girard as follows: "Religion is the mother of culture."[69] Girard sees religion here not primarily in its institutional, dogmatic, or theological dimension. He reads the Bible not as a theology or a theory of God, but first and foremost as an anthropological theory of humanity. Not God, but humans change. In archaic sacrifice scapegoating remains effective because the perpetrators are convinced of the victim's guilt. The rejection of human sacrifice occurs already in the Old Testament such as in the aborted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. By analogy, we could suggest that Machiavelli sees religion as the mother of politics. As he put it: "Just as the observance of divine worship is the cause of the greatness of republics, so the disregard of divine worship is the cause of their ruin, because where fear of God is lacking, that kingdom must either come to ruin or be sustained through fear of a prince."[70]

Machiavelli is acutely aware that Christianity is not only a doctrine or faith but a complex system of practices, rules, and rituals that grew historically. Christianity imposed itself over the "ancient religion" because it obliterated all of the institutions and ceremonies of paganism. "This matter can be understood by considering the methods the Christian sect employed against that of the pagans; they obliterated all of its institutions, all of its religious ceremonies, and suppressed the memory of its ancient

theology."[71] He claims that much as Christianity erased the memory of paganism—although he admits that, due to the continuity of the Latin language, memory has not completely disappeared—paganism had erased memories of earlier religions. Thus, such practices of erasure contribute to the mythical status of earlier religions.

Machiavelli's "economy of violence" defends the use of sacrificial violence. Machiavelli remains within the logics of archaic sacrifice that is not open to transcendental ethics or a Christian understanding of reconciliation. Yet, he is the first to clearly articulate the overlaps and difference between pagan and Christian religion as to sacrifice. While Saint Augustine had condemned the "original violence" used by Romulus in the foundation of Rome as being the political version of original sin, Machiavelli praises the founder of Rome for having done this with the ultimate end of national greatness in mind.[72] In a famous passage from the *Discourses*,[73] Machiavelli proposes a method of settling disunity in a city. He advocates the execution of ringleaders. There are only three ways: either to kill the ringleaders as done by the Romans, to ban them from the city, or to let them strike a peace under the condition not to continue having a feud. "Of all these ways, the last one is the most damaging, uncertain, and useless. Because where much blood was shed and other acts of violence occurred, a forced peace cannot possibly be durable, when the parties see each other day by day."[74]

A critic could of course join the chorus of those who consider Machiavelli a cursed faithless (*maledetto miscredente*).[75] This simplification has been rightly criticized as his thrust of criticism is not Christian faith but rather the papal court of Rome.[76] Rather than focusing on his religiosity, our focus here is Machiavelli's astute treatment of sacrifice and its role for foundations. Machiavelli realizes the broad cultural effect of Christian religion as a system of practices and rules in daily life. The first preface to the *Discourses* talks about the weakness that Christian religion (*la presente religione*) has brought about in the world,[77] which partly entails the forgetfulness about how to order republics and states. In the final version of the preface (B),[78] he transforms religion into education. In a similar vein, another passage in the *Discourses* will not attribute corrosive effects to Christianity in terms of a system of faith but rather talks

about education and false interpretations, which understand the religion as "*ozio*" not as "*virtù*."[79]

Political theorists would usually give less attention to the anthropological foundations of Machiavelli's work at the expense of philosophical or more strictly political concerns. In the eyes of some scholars, Machiavelli's great innovation came at the price of separating elements of analysis that had belonged together in classical political philosophy. Benedetto Croce suggested that Machiavelli discovered the necessity and the autonomy of politics that is detached from ethics and thus beyond good and evil.[80] For John A. Pocock, this crystallized in a "drastic experiment in secularisation" where a political action or process may develop entirely in a state of contingency.[81] Others such as Leo Strauss and his students made Machiavelli responsible for many of the ills of modernity. Strauss's main criticism is not that Machiavelli's intention was to convert politics into a technique but rather that Machiavelli aimed to turn upside down the teachings of the Bible and of classical philosophy. According to Strauss, Machiavelli turns virtue and justice into effects of necessity. As a consequence, the question of the common good will be removed from the sphere of morality and absorbed by necessity, which is the autonomous realm of passions and desires. Following in Strauss's footsteps, Mansfield and Tarcov go further and equate necessity to a new divinity: "Machiavelli substitutes necessity for divinity; he shows that since men are independent of divinity because of their necessities, they must decide independently according to those necessities."[82]

Machiavelli's attitude toward representatives of religion is indeed ambivalent. While he condemned Savonarola's action closer to the time of his political activism at the end of the fifteenth century, he later adopted many of his propositions. In modernity, religion has been conceptualized as one section of social and cultural life separate from the wider public interest. However, in the early sixteenth century, every aspect of life was pervaded by symbols and practices of faith. Any analysis that is in tune with the specific historical period must recognize that religion was not a faith that was freely chosen or rejected. Everything was, as Lucien Febvre has well shown, saturated by Christianity, from the cradle to the grave.[83] It was impossible to escape the omnipresence of churches, the sounds of their bells, the ceremonies, which regulated time and urban space but also

dominated education and the personal and institutional rites of passage. Catholic religion, with indulgence and corruption, with the papacy and the Inquisition, cast a spell even on the intellectuals of the time.

Given his primary focus on order, Machiavelli also sees that human desires are channeled differently according to historical conditions. The masses need good models, but the good is not transcendental or ethically good with an *imitatio Dei*. Rather, the good is enshrined in what he calls "ancient modalities" (*modi antichi*) by which the crowds will show reverence to a sacred beginning. Crucially, the longevity of republics will be increased if they can renovate the spirit of the beginnings (*rinnovazione al principio*).[84] As Sasso argued, the third book of the *Discourses* lacks a unifying element but takes its spirit from the first book.[85] Whenever Machiavelli espouses the return to the beginning, he refers to a situation that is corrupted by crisis, decay, and undifferentiation.[86] As the most powerful remedy against corruption he deems no method more effective, certain, and necessary than to kill the sons of Brutus.[87] This refers to the time when Lucius Iunius Brutus (509 BC) was consul and his sons Titus and Tiberius participated in a conspiracy of young nobles aimed to restore King Tarquinius to his power. Brutus condemned them in court to death and also attended the execution. Machiavelli then considers this founding murder a model character to imitate. As Parel put it, there always will be sons of Brutus, and there always must be, so that the exemplary act can be performed.[88] Severity, fear, and display of terror are necessary if the law is to be an instrument of republican liberty.

This defense of archaic sacrifice is central to maintaining republican liberty because people require a certain appearance of ancient modalities (*modi antichi*).[89] Concretely, staying very close to Livy's original comment (1, 8), Machiavelli shows that, after the transition from kingdom to the republic and the replacement of a king by two consuls, the republic created a so-called sacrificing king (*re sacrificulo*) who should oversee the annual sacrifice. The crucial point was that the continuity of ritual sacrifice would prevent citizens from wishing back the restoration of the kingdom. Because constitutional changes may disconcert people's minds, one should take all precautions by keeping these alterations as close to the old forms as possible.

For Girard, both myths and the Gospels contain narratives of scapegoating and sacrifice which are based on mimetic rivalry.[90] Between Dionysus and Jesus, there is no difference in terms of martyrdom. However, the interpretation is entirely different as Dionysus approves of the lynching of the unique victims, while the Gospels reject it. Girard emphatically claims that nobody before Nietzsche had stated the insight that Judaism and Christianity destroy the unanimity of the persecutors upon which the legitimacy of scapegoating in myths rely. For Nietzsche, the human species can only survive because of human sacrifice, which makes him reject Christianity's defense of the sacrality of life. Although Machiavelli does not explicitly connect scapegoating to the foundations of culture, his political theory contains many elements of Nietzsche's advocacy for sacrifice. In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli connects the dots between pagan sacrifice and Christ's self-sacrifice with a view to the momentous consequences of both practices for political order:

> In considering, therefore, why all the peoples of ancient times were greater lovers of liberty than those of our own day, I believe this arises from the same cause that today makes men less strong, which I believe lies in the difference between our education and that of antiquity, based upon the difference between our religion and that of antiquity. For, while our religion has shown us truth and the true path, it also makes us place a lower value on worldly honour, whereas the pagans, who greatly valued honour and considered it the highest good, were more ferocious in their actions. This can be seen in many of their customs, beginning with the magnificence of their sacrifices as compared to the modesty of our own, in which there is some pomp that is more delicate than magnificent but no bold or ferocious action. In their rites neither pomp nor magnificence was lacking in the ceremonies, but there was, in addition, the act of sacrifice full of blood and cruelty, and the slaughter of a great number of animals, a spectacle which inspired awe and rendered the men who witnessed it equally awesome. . . . Our religion has more often glorified humble and contemplative men rather than active ones. Moreover, our religion has defined the supreme good as humility, abjection, and contempt of worldly things; ancient religion located it in greatness of mind, strength of body, and in all the other things apt to make men the strongest. And if our religion requires that you have inner strength, it wants you to have the capacity to endure suffering more than to undertake brave deeds.[91]

In this remarkable passage, Machiavelli recognizes that the Gospels revealed the truth, but he thinks this truth is inconsequential before the brokenness of political reality. Most emphatically, Isaiah Berlin rejects the idea that Machiavelli's thought can be divided into two "autonomous spheres" of acting—the political and the moral. Rather, the conflict is between two moralities, which can be seen as either Christian or pagan.

Machiavelli draws on the ethics of the Greek polis, which would see communal purposes as the ultimate values from which the rest are derived. "Machiavelli's values are not Christian but they are moral values."[92] Machiavelli's originality is to have articulated the inextricable dilemma according to which different systems of values are in conflict with each other without the possibility of making a rational decision about them.[93] From Plato and the Stoics to Thomas More, political thinkers claimed they could measure the gap between the reality and some sort of ideal. For Machiavelli, the brokenness of political reality will potentially maintain the conflict between ultimate ends. Nobody before Machiavelli had suggested "that there might exist ends which were equally ultimate, but incompatible, with one another, that there might exist no single universal overarching standard that would enable a man to choose rationally between them."[94]

Machiavelli's sacred provides permanent legitimation because it keeps alive the memory of origins. The great founders such as Moses, Romulus, Cyrus, or Theseus are praised and distinguished because—unlike Cesare Borgia or Agathocles or the unarmed prophet Savonarola—they did not only have temporary success but founded a lasting regime.[95] Moreover, they need to be held in veneration, which cannot be achieved without the superiority of the use of arms. Despite his high esteem of orders of religion that are praised above the founders of states,[96] Machiavelli is silent with regard to Jesus, the unarmed prophet who founded Christianity. He nevertheless claims that "in truth, no maker of extraordinary laws who did not have recourse to God has ever existed in any society, because these laws would not otherwise be accepted, and because although the good things known to a prudent man are many, these things in themselves lack the self-evident qualities that can persuade others."[97]

Conversely, Girard acknowledges that cultural history has seen an evolution of sacrifice, a "progress," so to speak. Such progress is in the historical fact that Christ's self-sacrifice revealed—by the biblical scriptures and the Gospels—that archaic forms of sacrifice were a persecutor's tale. The foundation of Christianity reveals, for the first time, the innocence of the victim. Girard emphatically says that "we must refuse all the scapegoats that Nietzsche offers: slave morality, the resentment of others and so on."[98] Nietzsche, like Freud or Marx and other leading modern thinkers, "sing[s] the praises of murder and madness as the only true forces of 'liberation.'"[99]

Unlike Nietzsche, however, Machiavelli does not categorically reject the concern for victims. Machiavelli's advocacy of scapegoat victimage is not a conditionless formula or even dogma. Rather, it very much depends on the variability of the times and the degree of undifferentiation and corruption. He claims that rationalities of pagan sacrifice and Christian self-sacrifice coexist with each other in tension and conflict. Machiavelli indeed never takes the good for evil or the other way round. He always distinguishes good and evil. As he says in *The Prince*, "he should not depart from the good if it is possible to do so, but he should know how to enter into evil when forced by necessity."[100]

With Machiavelli, we have decisively moved away from Plato's insistence on the intrinsic effects that virtue had on the one who possessed it. Machiavelli's political morality sees civic virtue as necessary to curb desires and the ambition of the masses. The "method" to achieve civic virtue is the cultivation of another desire: the defense of the fatherland through military discipline and organization. If military institutions can be seen as analogous to Plato's system of education, the objective here is not the illumination of the soul but the disciplining of desires and passions.

Politics and Existence

The encounter between Machiavelli and mimetic theory sheds new light on an understanding of politics, which goes beyond the agentive and volition-based pursuit of interest, glory, and ambition. These are existential continuities, so to speak, permanent anthropological features. For Girard, mimetic theory demands an "existential understanding."[101] The existential here refers to the unity of human beings as a symbolic species, joining up the biological-instinctive and meaning-giving, symbolic spheres. There are parallels here, too, as Machiavelli's political theory can be argued to require an existential understanding on at least two accounts, one concerning the existential conditions of Machiavelli's individual life and the other one the life of his fatherland (*patria*). After all, the fragility of political regimes and internal security of Florence also determined Machiavelli's existence.

One could certainly read Machiavelli as part of the tradition of historiography and political thought, where the perpetrators and winners write history. Girard's *The Scapegoat* has exposed this pattern very clearly.

Machiavelli creates an uneasy conscience by partly revealing that the mystery of guilt is rooted in social consensus.[102] The problem with typologies that see Machiavelli in dichotomies as murderous or evil, republican or authoritarian, ancient or modern, is that they neglect the existential concerns of his thinking. Posterity considered Machiavelli as a counsellor for the ruthlessness in ensuring success. In reality, he was not a victor but a defeated. Machiavelli's fall into disgrace in 1512 had a traumatic impact on his psychology. Under suspicion of supporting a conspiracy he was denounced, then arrested and tortured but kept silent until his release on March 13, 1512. In 1513, he wrote to his nephew Giovanni Vernaccia that "since your departure . . . you should rather be amazed that I am still alive: one took my employment away, I nearly lost my life, but God and my innocence saved me. I have endured all the possible evils, including prison."[103] One year after writing *The Prince*, he writes to Vettori about the sadness of his situation: "I will therefore remain in my filth, without finding a soul who will remember my loyal services or who thinks that I am good for anything."[104] And at the end of 1515, he writes to Vernaccia: "As far as I am concerned, I have become useless to myself, to my parents and to my friends: this is my sad destiny."[105] As a victim of political repression, the idea that he wanted to flatter men of power is less convincing than the insight that he embarked on an enterprise of unmasking their cunning, their passions, and their violence.

As historian Reinhart Koselleck showed, many of the masters of history and political thought were not victors but the vanquished. [106] The victors can determine their fate only within the parameters of their own interests, their strategies, and the limited horizon of their own life course. They are tempted to interpret short-term successes by means of a long-term teleology. It is the privilege of the defeated, who either lose political or military office or have to go into exile, to be able to turn their disappointment into multi-perspectivity and insert the actions of their time into a longer-term scheme of things. If they happen to reflect methodically, they are much harder pressed to explain unintended outcomes. This is why they must look for longer-term or midterm causes, which attempt to frame the accident of surprise.

This defeat extends beyond Machiavelli's individual fate, engulfing Florence and Italy. From the insight that republican order, in order to be

durable, requires the institutionalization of conflicting interests, derived another problem. If there was a free play of interests and a competitive struggle for advantage, one nevertheless required an enveloping loyalty, which would transcend the otherwise necessary particularistic interests. Machiavelli's answer to this problem was to postulate national identity as an inexhaustible category of good. One of his last letters to Francesco Vettori in April 1527 made the stunning confession that "I love my native city more than my own soul."[107] In *The Prince*,[108] he likens the fate of Italy to the suffering body of Christ, which has been condemned in order to atone for past sins but awaits a savior:

> so that Italy, left as without life, waits for him who shall yet heal her wounds. . . . and cleanse those sores that for long have festered. It is seen how she entreats God to send someone who shall deliver her from these wrongs and barbarous insolencies. It is seen also that she is ready and willing to follow a banner if only someone will raise it. . . . Further than this, how extraordinarily the ways of God have been manifested beyond example: the sea is divided, a cloud has led the way, the rock has poured forth water, it has rained manna, everything has contributed to your greatness; you ought to do the rest.[109]

The emphatic and unusually passionate defense of his fatherland (*patria*) can be seen as the transfer of solidarity from individual interest toward a common "national" good. We can see here how "the nation stepped into the shoes of the Prince."[110] Machiavelli's reformulation of the common good as a moral commitment that transcends factional strife, interests, and the mundane concerns of daily politics requires some specific imagination of transcendence. According to Paul Ricœur, political associations imaginatively transcend the violence and evil that political rule inevitably produces.[111] "It is precisely because the State is a certain expression of the rationality of history, a triumph over the passions of the individual man, over 'civil' interests, and even over class interests, that it is the most exposed and most threatened aspect of man's grandeur, the most prone to evil."[112] This potentiality of evil coexists in tension with the collective self-representation of a polity as a rational association of free and equal members. Therefore, the political paradox lies in the fact that the "greatest evil adheres to the greatest rationality."[113] Not only political thinkers such as Aristotle or Rousseau connected the meaning of politics to the relation to some good as the core rationality of the political. Machiavelli's love of fatherland (*patria*) becomes the sacred that transcends mimetic rivalry, but

the Florentine knows that any such sacred is always threatened by the variability of the times.

It is the variability of the times that inflicted a further "defeat" on Machiavelli in the sense that his clear distinction between body politic in the *Discourses* and the absolute power of statecraft in *The Prince* were conflated by posterity. Machiavelli's reputation suffered not only from the Elizabethan authors that reproached him for ruthlessness but also from a general misunderstanding of what his conception of politics was. It is crucial that the word politics does not appear in *The Prince*, whereas it is mentioned only four times in the *Discourses* (as the term *vivere politico*). In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli likens the body politic (*vivere politico*) to the "good," while a principality is seen as "evil."[114] He writes: "Since the reorganization of a city into a body politic presupposes a good man, whereas becoming the prince of a republic through violent means presupposes an evil one, we will discover, for this reason, that only on the rarest occasions will a good man wish to become prince through evil means, even though his goal might be a good one; we will equally discover that equally rarely will an evil man who has become prince wish to govern well."[115]

In chapter 55 of the first book of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli emphasizes that the *vivere politico* requires fundamental equality and a degree of civility, to which the existence of feudal idlers (*gentiluomini*) is the greatest threat. It is safe to argue that the misreading of Machiavelli's work has been subjected to—and in particular the infamous equation of "Machiavellian" as evil and ruthlessness—stems from a fundamental confusion between the politics in the Aristotelian sense (expressed in the *Discourses*) and the absolute power of statecraft (expressed in *The Prince*). This misreading of Machiavelli could be seen as a scapegoating by posterity, an idea that would warrant further enquiry.

Beyond these existential implications of Machiavelli's politics, a mimetic reading of his work has the potential of decentering the heavy focus on individualism and rationality in contemporary political theory. Political theory and widespread common sense in political practice assume that human beings are individualistic, pursuing their self-interest rationally. Methodological individualism has become a central paradigm, assuming that our preferences are ontologically stable and that we are autonomous beings whose desires belong to us individually. On the contrary, mimetic

theory offers a vision of human beings whose intentions and interests are molded by reciprocity and emotional-instinctive relationships with others. Desires may therefore be authentic, predetermined, or fixed because they are seen to belong to each one individually. By contrast, mimetic theory denies the claim to authenticity. There is no individuality without prior models that mediate desires. Imitative processes show that "only mimetic desire can be free, can be genuine desire, human desire, because it must choose a model more than the object itself."[116] Roberto Farneti has shown that politics is neither limited to the rational individual actor nor to the idea that the logic of institutions dominates politics. Farneti considers mimetic doubles to constitute the fundamental structures of politics. Farneti's focus is on the foundations of modern politics, such as in Hobbes and in recent theories of justice, which are the work of John Rawls. He writes: "But mimetic theory brings to the fore a number of concerns that political scientists have consistently failed to notice: reciprocal imitation as the fundamental cause of human discord, the mechanisms of spontaneous polarization in human conflicts (i.e., the emergence of dyads or doubles), and the strange and ever-growing resemblance of the mimetic rivals."[117] They are existentially dependent on others. As such, they are socially generated.

It is precisely because of this existential dependence on others and the mimetics of desire that political ideologies that promise ultimate liberation, happiness, or justice must remain illusory. Taking the example of communism, political theorist Claude Lefort recognized the timeliness of Machiavelli's lesson in the sense that the promise of liberating people from all domination must remain illusory.

> The destruction of a dominant class did not give rise to a homogeneous society but rather a new form of social division . . . the presumed triumph of the people is accompanied by a new schism between a small number who desires to command, oppress, possess and, the others. . . . The Republic, the free institutions only live by virtue of the gap between these two desires. The fecundity of the law depends on the intensity of their opposition and, because there is no doubt that the desire of the great, if it does not find an obstacle, will not stop growing, the intensity of the opposition depends on the vigour of the people's resistance.[118]

Beyond the parochial world of early sixteenth-century Florence, Machiavelli's work is of importance today, notably if we accept a Girardian perspective on the increasing futility of sacrificial violence in the face of the

mimetic crises that characterize the variability of the times in a global world. As Paul Dumouchel recently outlined, the capacity of states to monopolize sacrificial violence in order to prevent uncontrolled outbreaks of violence is necessarily ambiguous.

> On one hand, they protect those who are attacked because they provide them with support. They can, in consequence, dissuade potential attackers because they increase the stakes, so to speak: solidarity ties make it more difficult to engage in violence and make aggression more dangerous for the aggressor. On the other hand, and for the same reason that they provide each with allies, they prevent the conflict from remaining contained. Solidarity ties ensure that a violent conflict never concerns present adversaries exclusively, but always threatens to spread to others and to include more and more individuals and groups.[119]

Girard's mimetic theory has made great steps to uncover the concealed origins of culture and it is effective in clarifying key propositions by the great thinker of crisis and order, who was Niccolò Machiavelli. Given the variability of times and the moody nature of fortune, however, a mimetic reading of Machiavelli can only go so far to demystify the Florentine who, ultimately, needs to be read afresh whenever the dikes and dams break.

NOTES

1. René Girard, with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London: Continuum, 2007), 151.

2. *Girard, Evolution and Conversion*, 148.

3. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and trans. Peter Bondanella (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), chapter 15.

4. Machiavelli, *Opere*, ed. Mario Bonfantini (Milan, 1963), 1112.

5. Roberto Farneti, *Mimetic Politics* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 2.

6. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 175ff.

7. The few comparative analyses between Machiavelli and Girard have indeed focused on the status of violence. For instance, see Jim Grote, "The Founding Murder in Machiavelli's The Prince," *Contagion* 5 (1998) : 118–34; Pierre Manent "La leçon des Ténèbres de René Girard," *Commentaire* 3 (1982): 457–63.

8. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Disourses*, ed. Bernard Crick, trans. Leslie J. Walker and Brian Richardson (London: Penguin, 2003), I.9.

9. Ibid., I.7.

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, vol. 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 1028.

11. Isaiah Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in *Against the Current* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 36.

12. Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1.

13. This was argued by Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 174.

14. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 25.

15. Ibid.

16. Both major works were published only posthumously (*The Discourses* in 1531 and *The Prince* in 1532).

17. Imitation of the actions of great leaders is also seen key for the establishment of new principalities in *The Prince*. See chapter 6.

18. Gennaro Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, vol. 1, *Storia del suo pensiero politico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1980), 613.

19. Machiavelli, preface B to *Discourses*.

20. Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, I, 593.

21. Peter Burke, *Tradition and Innovation in Renaissance Italy: A Sociological Approach* (Lugano, IT: Fontana, 1974), 45.

22. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 6.

23. Thomas Greene**,** "The End of Discourse in Machiavelli's 'Prince,'" *Yale French Studies* 67 (1984): 62.

24. Gennaro Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, vol. 2, *La Storiografia* (Bologna: Il Mulino. 1993), 583.

25. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.39.

26. Ibid., I.11.

27. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, III.43 (2, 3).

28. Anthony Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 105.

29. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.37.

30. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 9.

31. For more detail, see Anthony J. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

32. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, ed. by Laura Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), III.5.

33. For an authoritative discussion humoral theory in Machiavelli, see Marie Gaille, *Machiavelli on Freedom and Civil Conflict*: *A Historical and Medical Approach to Political Thinking* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2018), 33–69.

34. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapters 9 and 19.

35. Beyond *muovere* (move), there is *ribollire* (to boil), *pertularre* (to disrupt), *accendere* (to kindle), or *alterare* (to trouble), See Gaille, *Machiavelli on Freedom and Civil Conflict*, 52–53.

36. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 58.

37. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversation with Benoît Chantre* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 42.

38. For this see especially, Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.17 and 18; *Discourses*, I.37 and 39 as well as *Florentine Histories*, III.1.

39. *Florentine Histories*, preface, 7.

40. In Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.55, we read about a *vivere politico* that could be affected by *materia corrotta*.

41. For an interpretation which reads Machiavelli through scientific innovation of his time, see Roger Masters, *Machiavelli, Leonardo, and the Science of Power* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

42. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter 25.

43. Ibid., chapter 26.

44. Ibid., chapter 18.

45. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.17(3).

46. Ibid., I.55(23).

47. Ibid., I.4 (5).

48. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, 122.

49. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.58.

50. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 9.

51. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, III.1.

52. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.4.

53. Ibid., I.37(22).

54. Ibid., I.17.

55. Ibid., I.17 (16).

56. Ibid., I.17.

57. Ibid., I.55.

58. John A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 209.

59. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.55.

60. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, III.5, 110.

61. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.17/18; I.37.

62. Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, 2:198.

63. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, III.1; Machiavelli, *Discourses*, II.2.

64. Ibid., III.9.

65. Ibid., I.55.

66. Ibid., I.55 (17).

67. Ibid., I.55.

68. Ibid., I.55.

69. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 97.

70. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.11.

71. Ibid., II.5.

72. See Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 6; Discourses, I.9.

73. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, III.27.

74. Ibid., III.27.

75. Gennaro Sasso, introduction to *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, by Niccolò Machiavelli (Milano: Rizzoli, 1984), 23.

76. For an extensive analysis of Machiavelli's Christianity, see Michel Bergès, *Machiavel, un penseur masqué*? (Bordeaux: Editions Complexe, 2000), 125–78.

77. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, Preface A.

78. Ibid., Preface B.

79. Ibid., II.2.

80. Benedetto Croce, quoted in Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, 94.

81. Pocock, T*he Machiavellian Moment*, 190.

82. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, eds., *Discourses on Livy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 70.

83. Lucien Febvre, *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle: La religion de Rabelais* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003), 307–25.

84. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, III.1.

85. See ibid., especially I.18.

86. This is the primary theme of ibid., I.17 and 18; III.1.

87. See ibid., I.16 and III.3(4).

88. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, 132.

89. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.25.

90. René Girard, *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Paris: Grasset, 1999), 266.

91. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, II.2.

92. Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," 55.

93. Ibid.,152.

94. Ibid., 69.

95. See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.2. As Berlin noted to his own surprise, these are all mythical figures.

96. See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.9(1); I.10(1); I.11(2).

97. Ibid., I.11.

98. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 286–87.

99. Ibid., 287.

100. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 18.

101. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 172.

102. Eric Voegelin, *Die spielerische Grausamkeit der Humanisten: Studie zu Niccolò Machiavelli und Thomas Morus* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1995), 92.

103. Machiavelli, quoted in Bergès, *Machiavel, un penseur masqué*?, 165.

104. Ibid., 165.

105. Ibid., 166.

106. Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 68–69.

107. Machiavelli, quoted in Maurizio Viroli, "Introduction," in *The Prince*, ed. and trans. Peter Bondanella (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), xxxix.

108. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 26.

109. Ibid.

110. Quoted in Ernst Kantorowicz, "Mysteries of State: An Absolutist Concept and Its Late Mediaeval Origins," *Harvard Theological Review* 48, no. 1 (1955): 67.

111. Paul Ricœur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles Kelbley (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 1965.

112. Ibid., 261.

113. Ibid., 264.

114. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I.18.

115. Ibid., I.18.

116. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 58.

117. Farneti, *Mimetic Politics*, 4–5.

118. Claude Lefort, *Ecrire à l'épreuve du politique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1992), 173–74.

119. Paul Dumouchel, *The Barren Sacrifice: An Essay on Political Violence* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 11–12.

Thomas Hobbes

Wolfgang Palaver

THE ENGLISH PHILOSOPHER THOMAS HOBBES WAS A THINKER OF CRISIS; René Girard preferred them to those thinkers that did not look into the abyss of disorder always lurking behind orderly social relationships and political order. The reputation of such thinkers, however, is often bad as Girard concluded after comparing Hobbes with Shakespeare whose esteem did not suffer for being seen as a creative writer only.[1] According to Girard, "one of the great founders of political science is Hobbes, who, to a certain extent, managed to ground his thinking in crisis. He hasn't yet been entirely forgiven for that."[2] In the following, this chapter will show how close Hobbes and Girard came in seeing mimetic rivalry as the primary source of human conflict. Later parts will focus more closely on important differences between these two thinkers, which are most visible concerning the social contract, political theology, and ways to break free from an ontology of violence.

Significant signs of crisis marked Hobbes's life. In his short autobiography, he referred to the threatening Spanish Armada that was expected to support the invasion of England at the time he was born: "The rumor went everywhere through our towns that the last day for the nation was coming by fleet. And at that point my mother was filled with such fear that she bore twins, me and together with me fear."[3] During his lifetime, Hobbes faced severe political upheavals in Europe as well as in his own home country. It was the time of the so-called religious wars in Europe and the English civil wars.[4] For several years, Hobbes had to flee his country living in exile in Paris. "As soon as I sniffed the odor of civil war and saw

that the winds had stirred the fickle populace, I sought a more suitable place for my studies and my life. Hence I brought myself and my funds to Paris."[5] Living in such turbulent times explains why his work focuses so much on the mimetic undertow that made him a thinker of crisis. He himself claimed in his autobiographical piece that "my life is not incompatible with my writings."[6]

The Bellicose State of Nature Caused by Mimetic Rivalry

The most outstanding sign of his focus on crisis is his thought experiment of a bellicose state of nature necessitating the establishment of political order. The words he used to describe the state of nature as a state of war became famous. In his earlier work *De Cive*, we find the well-known formula of "a war of all men against all men."[7] The more expanded version in his later *Leviathan* reads as follows: "It is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a Warre, as is of every man, against every man."[8] The state of nature is also often equated with the wolfish nature of men ("Man is a wolf to Man"—*homo homini lupus*), although Hobbes himself used this expression only for the international anarchy between different states.[9] Only analogously applies this formula to the original state of nature too. According to Hobbes, the state of nature is characterized by "continuall feare, and danger of violent death," and it is for this reason that he described human life in this state as "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."[10] Hobbes did not claim that his description of the state of nature is a historical account of a particular period in human history but understood his claim rather as a logic assumption about human life outside political order. He found evidence for his thesis in the civil wars in his time and referred to the "savage people in many places of *America*."[11] Recent anthropological research confirms to some degree Hobbes's thesis about a higher degree of violence in the beginning of humanity. Primates and human beings share, due to social behavior and territoriality, a certain inclination toward conspecific violence.[12] According to this recent research, there was a 2 percent rate of lethal violence at the origin of our species. During human history, this rate rose to a rate as high as 30 percent and declined to 0.01 percent in modern societies.

Hobbes comes closest to Girard's mimetic theory where he reflects on the causes of human violence by clearly emphasizing mimetic rivalry. The most outstanding example is his connection of the equality of human beings with the heightened likelihood of mimetic rivalries leading to conflicts: "If any two men desire the same thing, which neverthelesse they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End . . . endeavour to destroy, or subdue one an other."[13] This is not a single example but stands for a much broader insight into the mimetic nature of human conflicts. He mentioned three principal causes of human conflicts: "First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence; Thirdly, Glory."[14] The first cause is, of course, a typical case of mimetic rivalry as it is also highlighted in Girard's reflection on the cause of human violence where he states, "we are *competitive* rather than aggressive."[15] The Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis recognized Hobbes's mimetic definition of power in his *Leviathan*: "*Naturall Power*, is the eminence of the Faculties of Body, or Mind."[16] Hobbes's observation of human behavior led him to conclude that man always looks to the other, that only by comparing himself with others does he achieve a measure of power. The same is also true regarding honor and prestige: "The manifestation of the Value we set on one another, is that which is commonly called Honouring, and Dishonouring. To Value a man at a high rate, is to *Honour* him; at a low rate, is to *Dishonour* him. But high, and low, in this case, is to be understood by comparison to the rate that each man setteth on himselfe."[17]

In addition, the typical passions of mimetic desire, vanity and envy, are mentioned in many passages of Hobbes's work.[18] It was Leo Strauss who referred to vanity as the essential passion that can be found at the heart of Hobbes's anthropology.[19] Hobbes himself explained vanity as a mimetic emotion. It roots in "glory," a passion characterized by comparison: "GLORY, or internal gloriation or triumph of the mind, is that passion which proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power, above the power of him that contendeth with us."[20] Where he specifies glory and refers more explicitly to vanity itself, "vain glory," Hobbes most likely refers to Don Quixote and his imitation of Amadis of Gaul when he relates vanity to the situation "when a man imagineth himself to do the action whereof he readeth in some romant, or to be like unto some other man whose acts he admireth."[21] Furthermore, Hobbes directly mentions

imitation and fashion, a typical modern expression of mimetic desire, as signs of vanity: "Signs of vain glory in the gesture, are imitation of others, counterfeiting attention, affectation of fashions."[22] Girard reflected on vanity where he summarizes Stendhal's novelistic insight into mimetic desire.[23]

Also, a mimetic vice like pride plays a central role in Hobbes's thought. This was especially highlighted by Eric Voegelin, who called Hobbes "one of the greatest psychologists of all times."[24] Voegelin clearly described pride as he found it explained by Hobbes as a mimetic vice: "Passion aggravated by comparison is pride."[25] The German political philosopher also recognized that what Hobbes understood as pride was the very vice that Augustine identified with original sin and as the perverse imitation of God.[26] Furthermore, Stephen Holmes characterizes Hobbes's depiction of human beings as imitative ("l'homme copie") in his introduction to Hobbes's *Behemoth*.[27] Hobbes came also close to directly mentioning mimetic rivalry in a passage of his early treatise *Human Nature, or the Fundamental Elements of Policy* where he compared human life with all its passions to a race in which everyone tries to be "foremost."[28] He explicitly calls the "endeavour to overtake the next" in this race "emulation," a term with which Shakespeare described mimetic desire.[29]

The Social Contract versus the Scapegoat Mechanism

Hobbes proposed a social contract as the way out of the bellicose state of nature. As long as there is no common power enabling a political order, the state of war continues. Hobbes understood the social contract as the transferal of all the individuals' power and strength onto the sovereign. This transferal of power creates a unity of the people in one single person

> as if every man should say to every man, *I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in Iike manner*. This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a COMMON-WEALTH, in latine CIVITAS. This is the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speake more reverently) of that *Mortall God*, to which wee owe under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defence.[30]

The embodiment of this person that the social contract created is the sovereign, who possesses the highest power, whereas all the others remain his subjects.

Girard criticized the concept of the social contract as a much too rational understanding of how a political order can suddenly emerge from the chaos of the war of all against all. He referred especially to Hobbes and Freud in his criticism:

> All the philosophers locate society's origin in a deliberate decision, but one that, all the same, is born of a sort of constraint: the need to come to an agreement on certain things. In the end this is even true of Hobbes, who, lacking the scapegoat mechanism, must conclude: violence looms, thus human beings are obliged to collaborate. It's even true of Freud, in *Totem and Taboo*: first there's the murder of the father, and then the brothers fight, and one fine day they decide to make peace. And so they sit down at the negotiating table. It's this idea of a well-thought-out starting point that I'm against.[31]

At the height of the mimetic crisis—the violent chaos from which human civilization emerged—it is inconceivable that human reason suddenly interferes to restore peace among the members of the violent community. Together with Durkheim, the great exception among modern thinkers in this regard, Girard emphasizes rather a religious origin of social and political order.

Girard rightly criticizes the missing of the scapegoat mechanism in Hobbes's account of how political order could have emerged from the state of nature. A closer look, however, reveals nevertheless traces of the scapegoat mechanism in the work of the English philosopher. We find remnants of it exactly where we come across the insoluble paradox of the social contract regarding its logical possibility in the state of nature. According to Hobbes, in the state of nature, in which there is no civil power, contracts are not reliable. "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."[32] If that insight is true, how could a first contract establishing a sovereign power—a social contract—have been concluded at all? What gives treaties any strength in the state of nature? Hobbes sees the fear of God as the only means by which contracts in the state of nature can be strengthened. Sacred oaths are the practical realization of that fear:

> Before the time of Civill Society, or in the interruption thereof by Warre, there is nothing can strengthen a Covenant of Peace agreed on, against the temptations of Avarice, Ambition,

> Lust, or other strong desire, but the feare of that Invisible Power, which they every one Worship as God; and Feare as a Revenger of their perfidy. All therefore that can be done between two men not subject to Civill Power, is to put one another to swear by the God he feareth: Which *Swearing*, or OATH, is a *Forme of Speech, added to a Promise; by which he that promiseth, signifieth, that unlesse he performe, he renounceth the mercy of his God, or calleth to him for vengeance on himselfe*. Such was the Heathen Forme, *Let* Jupiter *kill me else, as I kill this Beast*.[33]

In this passage, Hobbes himself indirectly links his concept of the social contract to sacred oaths rooted in the scapegoat mechanism. Divine vengeance is central to Hobbes's conception of oath leading back to the founding murder as the origin of a wrathful god. The particular oath mentioned by Hobbes is the one between Rome and Alba Longa reported in Titus Livius's history of Rome. Livy used the Latin words *foedus ferire* to describe the conclusion of this treaty. *Ferire* encapsulates the sacrificial element since it means not only to conclude a treaty but also to kill, to strike, to hit or to stab.[34] According to Fustel de Coulanges, the word *foedus* also goes back to bloody sacrifices because it means originally the victim—a kid or a young goat—that was slain when a treaty was concluded.[35] A careful reading of Hobbes's political philosophy therefore shows how he had to refer to sacred oaths rooted in the scapegoat mechanism to overcome the logical impossibility of a social contract.

Traces of the scapegoat mechanism are also discernable in Hobbes's understanding of sovereignty. One sees the structure of the mimetic snowballing of all against one, typical of the founding murder, in Hobbes's description of how the sovereign emanates from the social contract. The sovereign enters into binding agreement with nobody; he remains outside of all contracts and treaties. Like the original scapegoat, who was excluded from the community and seen as responsible both for the crisis and for its resolution, Hobbes describes his sovereign both as excluded from the community and as a figure in which its power is vested.[36] The sovereign is seen as above the law in the same way the scapegoat is perceived by the community as outside the social order. The king and the scapegoat, by means of their existence outside the law, are simultaneously the source of law for the community. The sovereign decrees laws to which he alone is not subject; the scapegoat—by being murdered for "violating" the community's still nonexistent prohibitions—provides retroactive justification for the laws that are put in place to prevent such future violations. The German political

scientist Thomas Heerich rightly speaks here of an "underground correspondence between the sovereign and the outlaw" in Hobbesian thought.[37] Hobbes underscores the sovereign's scapegoat role particularly clearly, where he speaks of the relationship between civil obedience and sovereign protection. He argues that the civil duty of obedience is only valid insofar as the ruler can provide protection for his subjects.[38] Civil obedience and sovereign protection, in other words, condition one another reciprocally. Of course, the creators of modern sovereignty initially intended for their power to be endless, but, as Hobbes argues, the "many seeds of a naturall mortality"—external wars and internal conflicts—turned the Leviathan into a merely "mortall god."[39] If we compare Hobbes's understanding of the conditions of obedience with older forms of the right to resistance, a distinct proximity between the sovereign and the scapegoat becomes apparent. The Germanic right to resistance was founded on the precise relationship of protection and obedience to which Hobbes refers. If rulers were unable to protect their subjects from external or domestic enemies, they were killed. In crises, such as bad harvests or war, the sacrifice of the ruler was a common and accepted practice.

A Pagan Political Theology with a Christian Cloak

These traces of the archaic sacred in the work of Hobbes leading back to the scapegoat mechanism do not automatically turn Hobbes into a religious thinker or a defender of the religious past. To the contrary, Hobbes is today often understood as a founding father of the modern separation of religion and politics. Mark Lilla, for instance, refers to Hobbes as one of the first thinkers that stand for the "great separation" between political theology and political philosophy.[40] Hobbes is, according to Lilla, of course, a representative of political philosophy. His *Leviathan* contains in Lilla's eyes "the most devastating attack on Christian political theology ever undertaken and was the means by which later modern thinkers were able to escape from it."[41] One can indeed find a lot of criticism of theologians, clergy, and religious concepts in Hobbes's work. It is also not false to recognize elements of secularization in the writings of the English philosopher. The most often quoted passage in this regard is his formula "*authoritas, non veritas, facit legem*" from the Latin version of his *Leviathan* that

emphasizes that the law is not based on any substantial truth but on the authority of the sovereign only.[42] But attempts to turn Hobbes into a founding father of the modern separation of religion and politics misses important dimensions of his work. As Paul Dumouchel rightly observed, religion became more and more important during the unfolding of Hobbes's political thought. In his first work *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico* from 1640 about ten percent of the text are dedicated to religion going up to more than half of the text in his *Leviathan* from 1651.[43] Dumouchel also makes the puzzling observation that "there is a theological basis for the separation of the Church and the state" in Hobbes's political thought.[44] If Hobbes justifies theologically the separation between church and state, then it is impossible to understand him as a radical secular representative of political philosophy in opposition to political theology. Hobbes himself stands for a particular type of political theology. On a purely political level, he did, however, not propose a separation of religion and politics at all.[45] He, on the contrary, brings them again together as Jean-Jacques Rousseau later clearly remarked: "Of all Christian writers, the philosopher Hobbes alone has seen the evil and how to remedy it, and has dared to propose the reunion of the two heads of the eagle, and the restoration throughout of political unity, without which no State or government will ever be rightly constituted."[46]

What Rousseau observed in his *Social Contract* is today confirmed by recent historical research on Hobbes's allegiances during the English Revolution. This research that no longer "failed to grasp the fundamentally religious nature of the Hobbesian project" emphasizes his shift from the royalists to Oliver Cromwell and the Independents and with it "his radically Erastian ecclesiology: his project to reduce the Christian church, its clergy and doctrine, to an arm of the state."[47] Jeffery Collins summarizes Hobbes's attempt to unite religion and politics under the umbrella of the state: "Hobbes understood the Revolution as a war over the nature of the church as an independent corporate body, and the status of the clergy as an estate of the realm. In this sense, Hobbes interpreted the English Revolution as an ecclesial crisis, and as the culmination of the long Reformation struggle to redefine the political structure of Christendom by submitting the universal church to the power of emerging modern states."[48]

Hobbes's *Leviathan* is not a secular state free of religion but a striking example of how the nation-state took over the role of the church. The English philosopher stands for a development that went along with the so-called wars of religion in Europe that led to the establishment of religiously largely homogeneous territories—*cuius regio, eius religio*—a confessionalization of the state that was deeply intensified from the end of the sixteenth century onward and that did not end in 1648.[49] In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the state increasingly became sacralized.[50] We should therefore not forget that Hobbes called his Leviathan a "Mortall God."[51]

Mark Lilla also uses his narrative about a grand separation to claim a Western superiority of the secular West over against an Islam that allegedly stands for political theology.[52] Again, such a claim runs against Hobbes's own understanding of how the state relates to religion. He himself praised Mohammed, who like the Roman king Numa Pompilius established a stable civil religion to "keep people in obedience, and peace."[53] The essayist and political theorist Francis Osborne, a Cromwellian and a friend of Hobbes, identified strongly with the religio-political view expressed in the *Leviathan* and recognized clear parallels with the "Turkish model of religious governance," viewing "Islam was a triumph of reason-of-state, manifesting a keen understanding of the political uses of religion."[54] Also Henry Stubbe, another personal friend and loyal follower of Hobbes at Oxford, asked seriously the question if Islam "might not on political grounds be a better religion for Western countries to adopt than Christianity."[55] In this light, it is no surprise that the Cromwellian church was criticized for "Mahometanism" and that Hobbes himself was accused of creating with his type of civil religion a "'kind of Mahometan Christianity' enslaved to the state."[56] One cannot refer to Hobbes to prove an all too simple juxtaposition of political philosophy and political theology.

Hobbes's work includes its own political theology. The Jewish philosopher Jacob Taubes attributed a "Leviathanian Christo-Logics" to Hobbes and highlighted the cardinal proposition "that Jesus is the Christ," which is repeated more than forty times in the *Leviathan*.[57] Gerrit Manenschijn follows partly Taubes and sees in Hobbes the originator of the political theology of modernity without omitting the fact that he is at the same time also the great philosopher of civic society who contributed to the

separation of state and church.[58] Paul Dumouchel, too, claims that Hobbes represents the separation of religion and politics, but, in contrast to Mark Lilla, he shows that it is Hobbes's biblical theology and his understanding of revelation that explains the separation of religion and politics.[59] According to Dumouchel, Hobbes recognized—like Max Weber and René Girard—Christianity as the source of secularization.[60]

It is definitely true that the biblical revelation has led to the de-deification of the political realm. Eric Voegelin coined the term "de-divinization" for this process.[61] We can observe the beginnings of it already in the Hebrew Bible insofar as the exodus from Egypt results in a distinction between religion and politics. The divine was emancipated from politics becoming the "exclusive property of god."[62] The Hebrew prophets continued in this direction by reminding the kings of Israel of anti-statist times. In the New Testament this type of thinking that significantly differed from surrounding cultures resumed. It culminates in Jesus's call to "give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mk 12:17). This biblical verse undermines the religious exaltation of the state as it was common in ancient cultures. At least in the Western tradition of Christianity, the biblical legacy led to a significant distinction between church and state as we can recognize it in the polarity between pope and emperor, in Pope Gelasius's teaching about the two swords or in Augustine's important distinction between the city of God and the earthly city.

Is Hobbes a representative of this biblical de-deification of the political realm? His political theory has surely to be interpreted within the broader framework of the Christian tradition with which he engaged so intensively. Hobbes's allowance of an inner reservation that one can in one's own heart differ from the public religion prescribed by the sovereign is definitely influenced by his reading of the Bible. According to Hobbes, the sovereign, "hath the Supreme Power in all causes, as well Ecclesiasticall, as Civill, as far as concerneth actions, and words, for those onely are known, and may be accused; and of that which cannot be accused, there is no Judg at all, but God, that knoweth the heart."[63]

Regarding an inner reservation, Hobbes referred to the example of the Syrian army commander Naaman in the Hebrew Bible who remained, in the eyes of the prophet Elisha, a true believer while externally worshipping a

pagan idol (2 Kings 5:1–27).[64] A closer reading of the Bible, however, shows that restricting one's faith to the heart is not enough but has to lead to the confession with the mouth too (Rom 10:9–10). Hobbes ignored such biblical passages and often referred only selectively to the Bible. Regarding the relationship between religion and politics, an even deeper distance from the biblical de-divinization characterizes Hobbes's work. His vindication of a strong state that goes along with a tendency to divinize public order had to take back the prophetic dissociation from state power.[65] According to Hobbes, only the kings in the Hebrew Bible are true prophets. All prophetic criticism was marginalized or turned into its opposite. He stood at the threshold of a divinization of the political realm as it increasingly has become a feature of the modern world if we just look at the political religions of the twentieth century. We can discover in the work of the English philosopher traces of the modern development that Voegelin understood as a "re-divinization of man and society."[66] Hobbes called his Leviathan a "God" and distinguished him only slightly from the "Immortal God" by adding the word "Mortall."[67] And he also claimed that human beings turn into gods for each other ("Man is a God to Man"—*homo homini Deus*) as soon as they leave the state of nature and become citizens of a body politic.[68] It is no surprise at all that Voegelin already in 1938—when he started to focus on political religions—referred to Hobbes as the "political theologian" who stood at the threshold of the transition from the Christian de-divinization of politics to its re-divinization: "The great theologian of the particular ecclesia with immediacy to God was Thomas Hobbes. He is frequently considered to be the theorist of absolute monarchy, which he is; but he is more than that, because he created the symbol of the Leviathan, the omnipotent state immediately under God and acting upon divine orders."[69] Voegelin knew very well that it takes only a small step to go from Hobbes toward the modern political religions: "The symbolism of the completely closed inner-worldly ecclesia did not have to move far beyond the symbol of the Leviathan—the decisive step was the decapitation of God."[70] In his later work *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin showed how strongly Hobbes tried to establish an "English *theologia civilis* in the Varronic sense."[71] With this characterization of Hobbes's political theology, Voegelin emphasized how much Hobbes

departed from Augustine's position, which was close to the biblical legacy with its clear distance from divinizing politics typical for paganism.

A closer historical analysis of Hobbes's work shows his hidden sympathies with pagan political theologies.[72] Jeffrey Collins summarizes Hobbes's leaning toward paganism without overlooking the fact that the English philosopher had to present it within a Christian framework: "*Leviathan*'s task was to suggest a model of Christian theology that would render it as politically malleable as the pagan religious doctrines had been. *Leviathan* was to costume the virtues of the 'golden age of antiquity' with a Christian cloak."[73] This thesis can easily be confirmed by looking at the parallel between the political sovereign and the image of God in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. It is the omnipotent God of the final speeches in the book of Job that is reflected in Hobbes's sovereign. With the help of Girard's mimetic theory, this image of God can be traced back to its archaic roots in the scapegoat mechanism and can be clearly distinguished from the "God of victims" that we find at the center of the biblical religions.[74]

In Hobbes's political philosophy, it becomes obvious how especially in the realm of politics the mythic patterns stemming from the scapegoat mechanism continue to have an effect. The biblical revelation has challenged these patterns. From a political perspective, the revelation presents itself as a subversive force leading to the dissolution of all order rooted in the foundational murder. It was the infamous German law scholar Carl Schmitt who clearly recognized this challenge coming along with the biblical revelation in his interpretation of Hobbes's political theology:

> Thomas Hobbes's most important sentence remains: Jesus is the Christ. The power of such a sentence works even if it is pushed to the margins of the conceptual system of an intellectual structure, even if it is apparently pushed outside the conceptual body. This deportation is analogous to the domestication of Christ undertaken by the Grand Inquisitor of Dostoevsky. Hobbes articulated and provided scientific reason for what the Grand Inquisitor did: to make the effect of Christ harmless in the social and political sphere; to de-anarchize Christianity but to leave to it at the same time some kind of legitimating effect in the background and in any case not to do without it. A clever tactician gives up nothing, at least as long as it is not totally useless.[75]

Following this interpretation, Hobbes appears as a political theologian who tried—like the Grand Inquisitor—to contain the political realm that the biblical revelation has destabilized with the help of a mythic theology without, however, giving up the Christian framework in which he presented

his political thought. This is also true concerning apocalypticism that played a huge role during the English Revolution. Hobbes not only criticized fundamentalist versions of it but also applied certain parts of apocalyptic thinking in the Bible to contain all challenges to political order. His political theory functions like a *katéchon* (2 Thes 2:6–7) that prevents the outbreak of apocalyptic chaos but also holds back the second coming of Jesus Christ.[76] This again shows his departure from the core of the biblical revelation. Alison McQueen goes even a step further claiming that Hobbes responded to the apocalypticism of his contemporaries "not by rejecting the apocalyptic imaginary, but by redirecting it in the service of sovereign power. He fights apocalypse *with apocalypse*."[77] She recognizes a secular apocalypse "in which the terror and chaos of the state of nature usher in an enduring commonwealth ruled by a mortal God."[78] A Girardian interpretation of Hobbes's relation to the apocalypse takes a more nuanced stance. Girard understood himself as an apocalyptic thinker and appreciated therefore Hobbes's apocalyptic awareness of the mimetic crisis. According to Girard, apocalyptic thinkers are "always inclined to exaggerate the urgency of the crisis in which, they feel, their societies as well as themselves are plunged."[79] There is "a grain of truth" in distrusting them, "but it becomes a justification for massive untruth when it leads to a blanket dismissal of the fundamental insight these thinkers provide."[80] Girard's last book that dealt with Clausewitz's theory of war underlines his radical apocalyptic stance. He, however, did not maintain a secular apocalypse or an apocalypse without hope: "The apocalypse does not announce the end of the world; it creates hope. If we suddenly *see* reality, we do not experience the absolute despair of an unthinking modernity, but rediscover a world where things have meaning."[81] Girard stands for a Christian apocalypse that does not exclude hope, a virtue that is lacking in Hobbes's pessimist apocalypticsm. This lack of hope corresponds with his rejection of the *summum bonum* as we will see in the final part of this chapter.

An Ontology of Violence Following the Rejection of the *Summum Bonum*

Despite the many parallels we can find between Hobbes's political thought and Girard's mimetic theory, we finally have to emphasize also an

important difference between these two ways of thinking. Hobbes clearly represents an ontology of violence as it was understood by Voegelin in regard to the English philosopher's rejection of the tradition of the *summum bonum*, the highest good: "If there is no *summum bonum* . . . there is no point of orientation that can endow human action with rationality. Action, then, can only be represented as motivated by passions, above all, by the passion of aggression, the overcoming of one's fellow man. The 'natural' state of society must be understood as the war of all against all, if men do not in free love orient their actions to the highest good."[82]

Hobbes's leaning toward an ontology of violence did not result from believing that God created evil human beings. In this regard, he remained inside the Christian tradition of a good creation and maintained that humans were "not evil by nature."[83] His ontology of violence resulted rather from his rejection of the tradition of *summum bonum* in which Christian thinkers recognized a possible overcoming of the deadlock of mimetic rivalry. According to Hobbes, "the Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers."[84] With his rejection of a *summum bonum*, he also claimed that there is no connection between our life in this world and a longing for eternal peace in God: "What kind of Felicity God hath ordained to them that devoutly honour him, a man shall no sooner know, than enjoy; being joyes, that now are as incomprehensible, as the word of Schoolemen, Beatificall Vision, is unintelligible."[85] His rejection of a *summum bonum* forced Hobbes to conclude that human beings are condemned to long for temporal goods only. By comparing Hobbes and Augustine, Voegelin showed how far Hobbes had departed from Christian tradition in this regard. Both Augustine and Hobbes shared a rather negative view of human beings, emphasizing the strong influence of pride. They differ, however, strongly in regard to the possibility to overcome pride. Whereas Augustine distinguished the love of self (*amor sui*) from the love of God (*amor Dei*), Hobbes "threw out the *amor Dei* and relied for his psychology on the *amor sui*, in his language the self-conceit or pride of the individual, alone."[86] Christianity, in accordance with the biblical revelation, always emphasized the human orientation primarily toward eternal or transcendent goods—especially the love of God—to avoid the lethal trap of mimetic rivalry

following the soul's longing for temporal goods. Both Augustine and Hobbes were aware how much human violence is rooted in mimetic rivalry. But it was only the Church Father who realized that there is a way out of this deadlock—namely, by searching first for the kingdom of God. This is the same insight that is expressed in the Ten Commandments. We are only able to follow the tenth commandment—the rule against mimetic rivalry—if we obey the first commandment by overcoming idolatry.[87] For Hobbes, there is no *fruitio Dei*, or indulgence in God, which for Augustine and the Christian tradition is the ultimate goal of all human aspiration. All that remains in Hobbes's universe is the fear of death, or *summum malum*, and the struggle for worldly precedence. It follows logically that this idea of man results in Hobbes's arguments for the absolute state. The "King of the Proud"—Hobbes's Leviathan quoting the book of Job[88]—"must break the *amor sui* that cannot be relieved by the *amor Dei*."[89] On the international level, the anarchic and violent state of nature between all the Leviathans will remain permanently. Hobbes's ontology of violence does not allow a way out.

Voegelin's juxtaposition of Augustine and Hobbes helps to understand the essential difference between Hobbes and Girard. Girard sides with Augustine about whom he remarked that "three quarters of what I say is in Saint Augustine."[90] For the French American anthropologist, human beings are not determined to remain inside the violent realm of mimetic rivalry. Girard recognized a positive mimesis that depends on its openness toward the transcendent God.[91] If God is our *summum bonum*, we can imitate each other without becoming automatically enemies because God is not at all a good that is lessened if more people reach out for it. The longing for God can be shared and imitated without being driven into relationships of violence and war. The Christian tradition was fully aware of this important path to overcome violence. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor emphasizes Girard's openness toward transcendence as his way of overcoming violence: "The only way fully to escape the draw towards violence lies somewhere in the turn to transcendence, that is, through the full-hearted love of some good beyond life. Here we enter a terrain, that of religion and violence, which has been explored in a very interesting way by René Girard."[92]

Positive mimesis means opening up toward the grace of God that enables us to leave behind all selfish desire. Girard reminded us of Jesus's invitation to follow him and his Father "as the best model for all humans" because "neither the Father nor the Son desires greedily, egotistically."[93] God's grace helps us to overcome pride and leave the bellicose state of nature even on the international level. Girard sides with Hobbes in taking the always present danger of war seriously but departs from the English philosopher where he does not see a way out of a world of war. It is due to his openness toward positive mimesis that Girard could claim that humans are not by destination locked up in a world of war but "are entirely able to renounce their violence."[94]

NOTES

1. René Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991), 227.

2. René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 13.

3. Thomas Hobbes, "The Life of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury," *Interpretation* 10, no. 1 (1982): 1.

4. Charles W. A. Prior, "England's Wars of Religion: A Reassessment," in *The European Wars of Religion: An Interdisciplinary Reassessment of Sources, Interpretations, and Myths*, ed. Wolfgang Palaver, Harriet Rudolph, and Dietmar Regensburger (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2016).

5. Hobbes, "Life of Thomas Hobbes," 7.

6. Ibid.

7. Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 12.

8. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88.

9. Hobbes, *Citizen*, 3.

10. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 89.

11. Ibid.

12. José María Gómez, Miguel Verdú, Adela González-Megías, and Marcos Méndez, "The Phylogenetic Roots of Human Lethal Violence," *Nature* 538 (2016): 233–37; Mark Pagel, "Animal behaviour: Lethal Violence Deep in the Human Lineage," *Nature* 538 (2016): 180–81.

13. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 87; cf. René Girard, "Victims, Violence and Christianity," *The Month* 31, no. 4 (1998): 132–33.

14. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 88.

15. René Girard, "Violence and Religion: Cause or Effect?," *The Hedgehog Review* 6, no. 1 (2004): 9; cf. René Girard and Maria Stella Barberi, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 7–9.

16. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 62; Hans Achterhuis, *Het rijk van de schaarste: Van Thomas Hobbes tot Michel Foucault* (Utrecht: Ambo/Baarn, 1988), 23.

17. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 63.

18. Stephen Holmes, "Introduction," in *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, ed. Thomas Hobbes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xxx–xxxi; Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard's Mimetic Theory*, trans. Gabriel Borrud (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 96–99.

19. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 11–15,111–13,132–35.

20. Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994), 50.

21. Ibid., 51; cf. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 1–4.

22. Hobbes, *Elements*, 51.

23. Girard, *Deceit*, 6–7, 14–15.

24. Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5, *Modernity without Restraints: The Political Religions, the New Science of Politics, and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 234.

25. Ibid., 235.

26. Palaver, *Girard's Mimetic Theory*, 91.

27. Holmes, "Introduction," 17.

28. Hobbes, *Elements*, 59.

29. Girard, *Theater*, 163–64.

30. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 120.

31. Girard, *When These Things*, 25.

32. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 117.

33. Ibid., 99.

34. Cf. Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 35: "Whether in Israel, Greece, or Rome, no agreement, no contract, no alliance can be made without sacrifice. And, in the language of the oath, the object of aggression that is to be 'struck' and 'cut' becomes virtually identical with the covenant itself: *foedus ferire* . . ."

35. Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Instituions of Greece and Rome*, trans. Willard Small (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 200.

36. Cf. Paul Dumouchel, *The Ambivalence of Scarcity and other Essays* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 249.

37. Thomas Heerich, *Transformation des Politikkonzepts von Hobbes zu Spinoza: Das Problem der Souveränität* (Würzburg, DE: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 55.

38. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 153.

39. Ibid., 153, 120.

40. Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Vintage, 2008).

41. Ibid., 75.

42. Thomas Hobbes, *Thomae Hobbes Malmesburiensis opera philosophica quae latine scripsit omnia in unum corpus*, vol. 3, *Leviathan: Sive de materia, forma, et potestate civitatis ecclesiasticae et civilis* (London, 1841), 202.

43. Paul Dumouchel, "The Modern State or the Myth of 'Political Violence'," in *The European Wars of Religion: An Interdisciplinary Reassessment of Sources, Interpretations, and Myths*, ed. Wolfgang Palaver, Harriet Rudolph, and Dietmar Regensburger (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2016), 193–94.

44. Ibid., 196.

45. Charles W. A. Prior, "England's Wars of Religion: A Reassessment," in *The European Wars of Religion: An Interdisciplinary Reassessment of Sources, Interpretations, and Myths*, ed. Wolfgang Palaver, Harriet Rudolph, and Dietmar Regensburger (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2016), 124.

46. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole, J. H. Brumfitt, and John C. Hall (London: Dent, 1990), 302.

47. Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4–5.

48. Ibid., 10.

49. José Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 110.

50. William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 176; William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2011); William T. Cavanaugh, "Secularization of the Holy: A Reading of the 'Wars of Religion'," in *The European Wars of Religion: An Interdisciplinary Reassessment of Sources, Interpretations, and Myths*, ed. Wolfgang Palaver, Harriet Rudolph, and Dietmar Regensburger (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2016), 183.

51. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 120.

52. Lilla, *Stillborn God*, 316–19.

53. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 82; cf. Collins, *Allegiance*, 44.

54. Collins, *Allegiance*, 175–77.

55. Richard Tuck, *Hobbes* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), 89.

56. Collins, *Allegiance*, 170–71, 215.

57. Jacob Taubes, "Leviathan as Mortal God: Actuality of Thomas Hobbes," *Political Theology* 19, no. 3 (2018): 191–92.

58. Gerrit Manenschijn, "Thomas Hobbes, Urheber der politischen Theologie der Moderne," *Evangelische Theologie* 56, no. 6 (1996).

59. Paul Dumouchel, "The Political Problem of Religion: Hobbes's Reading of the Bible," in *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, ed. Michael A. Stewart (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2000), 9.

60. Ibid., 26.

61. Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraints*, 104.

62. Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, trans. Robert Savage (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 46.

63. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 378.

64. Ibid., 343–44, 414.

65. Wolfgang Palaver, *Politik und Religion bei Thomas Hobbes. Eine Kritik aus der Sicht der Theorie René Girards* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1991), 175–241; Kinch Hoekstra, "Disarming the Prophets: Thomas Hobbes and Predictive Power," *Rivista di Storia Della Filosofia* 59, no. 1 (2004).

66. Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraints*, 175.

67. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 120.

68. Hobbes, *Citizen*, 3.

69. Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraints*, 53.

70. Ibid., 64.

71. Ibid., 214.

72. Patricia Springborg, "Hobbes, Heresy, and the *Historia Ecclesiastica*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55, no. 4 (1994); Patricia Springborg, "Thomas Hobbes on Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Collins, *Allegiance*.

73. Collins, *Allegiance*, 45.

74. René Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 141–43, 154–68; Palaver, *Politik und Religion*, 242–90.

75. Carl Schmitt, *Glossarium: Aufzeichnungen aus den Jahren 1947 bis 1958* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2015), 184; Wolfgang Palaver, "Hobbes and the Katéchon: The Secularization of Sacrificial Christianity," *Contagion* 2 (1995): 67.

76. Palaver, "Hobbes and the Katéchon"; cf. Michael Kirwan, "Mimetic Theory and the Katéchon," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion*, ed. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2017).

77. Alison McQueen, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 20; cf. 105–46.

78. Ibid., 21.

79. Girard, *Theater*, 228.

80. Ibid.

81. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), xiii; cf. 113, 119, 177.

82. Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraints*, 306.

83. Hobbes, *Citizen*, 11.

84. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 70.

85. Ibid., 46.

86. Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraints*, 238.

87. Wolfgang Palaver, "Envy or Emulation: A Christian Understanding of Economic Passions," in *Passions in Economy, Politics, and the Media: In Discussion with Christian Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Palaver and Petra Steinmair-Pösel (Münster: LIT, 2005), 150–51.

88. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 221. "On earth it has no equal, a creature without fear. It surveys everything that is lofty; it is king over all that are proud" (Job 41:33–34, New Revised Standard).

89. Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraints*, 238.

90. Girard, *When These Things*, 133.

91. Cf. Petra Steinmair-Pösel, "Original Sin, Positive Mimesis," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion*, ed. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver (New York:

Palgrave/Macmillan, 2017).

92. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 639.

93. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 14.

94. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 68.

Blaise Pascal

Christine Orsini

Translated by Florina Haret

PASCAL (1623–1662) WAS A SCIENTIFIC, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND LITERARY genius. He was acknowledged as such by his contemporaries, and, despite having had no "devotees," he left memorable marks of his life and his thought, defying oblivion and crossing the ages until our time: his experiments proving the existence of a vacuum, his famous wager regarding belief in the existence of God, the "intuitive mind and the mathematical mind,"[1] the "two infinites,"[2] sentences of extraordinary beauty, "the eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me,"[3] or "the heart has its reasons which reason itself does not know."[4] He represented the universe, which had become unimaginable with Galileo, as an "infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere."[5] He ironized: "A human being is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed," etc.[6]

Self-taught and educated by his father, who saw various scholars on a regular basis, he had, according to the family legend, rediscovered Euclidean geometry on his own, at the age of twelve, using lines and circles. His "Essay on Conics," written when he was sixteen, raised him to the top of the scientific hierarchy of the age. At the age of twenty, he wore himself out constructing an arithmetic machine, the first calculator. His "geometry of chance" was a prefiguration of probability calculus. After 1654, when, one November evening, he went through a "night of fire,"[7] he led a life of piety, devoted to nurturing the project of an "Apology for Christianity," which did not prevent him from clandestinely writing and

publishing the *Provincial Letters*,[8] enlisting the support of laughter against the Jesuits and their "grace [that] is sufficient without sufficing";[9] he also undertook, together with his friend, the Duke de Roannez, social ventures such as the creation of a public transportation company (the "carrosses à cinq sols"), and, before dying in a state of holiness at the age of thirty-eight, he solved the thorny problem of the geometry of the cycloid.

The *Pensées*, published in 1670, are *at the same time* a draft—several *liasses* of notes intended to be organized and developed into a masterpiece, that is, "Apology" whose existence never materialized for want of time—and a *masterpiece* of unparalleled beauty and depth, consisting of fragments, some of which are very short, like fleeting thoughts grasped in mid-air, while others are well-developed, actual bursts of eloquence addressing the reader, sometimes in a blunt manner. Even if some *liasses* have been classified by their author, the ordering of the whole is a matter for interpretation, like the editing of a film. Numerous editions of the *Pensées* have already been published, and it is likely that many more will follow.

René Girard's birth (Avignon, 1923) took place exactly three centuries after that of Blaise Pascal (Clermont, 1623). Three centuries during which Western civilization became the first atheist civilization in history: as Girard wrote in his last book, "We 'believed' in reason, as people used to believe in the gods," and we still believe in it, he specifies, "in order to close [our] eyes to the catastrophes that are imminent today."[10] One can therefore acknowledge the fact that Pascal's efforts to put reason back in its (true) place, as well as all the genius that he employed to convince the libertines to attend to their own salvation, have failed. To such an extent that Europe relinquished acknowledging its Christian roots and the author of the *Pensées*, after having seen his religiosity attributed by Voltaire to this "sublime misanthrope['s]" poor health condition, is perceived by the moderns as a *tragic thinker*. He was "recovered" by the Romanticists, by the Marxists, by the agnostics, by the existentialists, and so forth. The question that we raise here is that of knowing whether a Girardian "recovery" of the *Pensées*—while trying to give a different meaning than that of "appropriation" to this word—is possible. A Girardian reading of Pascal will provide the opportunity to return to the biblical sources of their thought, as well as to restore the apologetic aim of the *Pensées*, too often neglected for the benefit of a very disenchanted analysis of the human

condition. Neither Pascal nor Girard are "thinkers of suspicion"; they encourage us, by different means, to take over our Christian heritage and to "change our life" by welcoming the Revelation.

Two Excesses: Excluding Reason, Allowing Only Reason

Girard and Pascal share the fact of being *Christian thinkers*;[11] of having built, in a fragmentary way, an *apology for Christianity*, which is the *true religion*; and of having respectively created a resolutely novel and original work for their age, a work wherein religious faith and anthropological reflection are two versions of the same endeavor. If Pascalian anthropology is *philosophical*, whereas the Girardian one is *scientific*, then they both have been received by the moderns in the same way: instead of being connected with a biblical exegesis and, even better, with the Christian Revelation, which, according to their authors, bases them on truth, they have been detached from it. Indeed, most of Pascal's and of Girard's modern readers are only interested in the anthropological side of their work and regret the fact that these discoverers of such profound truths have had ulterior motives of a religious nature. This is especially true for Girard. In the manner of Darwin, he proposes a theory of the origins of man and of cultures whose explanatory power has convinced a great number of researchers, but he never stopped upsetting, even scandalizing the scientific community, by striving to show that the evangelical Revelation explains and partly governs not only his work, but, whether we like it or not, the cultural evolution of the human world.

Undoubtedly, René Girard read and reread the *Pensées***,** but life's changing circumstances, after having given him a historian's training, made him come across the truth on desire, not in the philosophers, but in the great novelists. Girard would explicitly pay homage to Pascal—not only for having defined and understood man starting from original sin but also for having brought to light this "*essential war*" that violence and truth have been forever waging against each other—only in *Battling to the End*, a book of conversations with Benoît Chantre.[12]

The objective of our study is to show that, if reason and faith have also waged a *long war* against each other, both Pascal's and Girard's thoughts vouch for the necessity of reconciling them; *they can neither be merged,*

nor separated: our salvation—however one might consider it, individually or collectively—is at stake. Philosophically, the distinction made by Pascal among orders is fundamental. It permits shedding light on the project of the *Pensées*; it should also help Girard's readers to allow for the idea more readily according to which a real science of man must make room for the religious aspect. We would like to cast a Girardian light on the great Pascalian themes, but reading the *Pensées* could also enable us to advance our understanding of mimetic theory, particularly thanks to the use of a humble and lucid reason, solidary with, and not adversary of, the other faculties of the mind, as recommended by Pascal.

To Have No Time for Philosophy?

"To have no time for philosophy is truly to philosophize."[13] This is a thought that René Girard—who blamed the weakness of philosophy for its complicity in a human world built on violence, by not taking violence seriously enough and by inventing a social contract to fix the problem or a "cunning of reason" that would use passions in order to establish its reign—would not have found disagreeable. In a "Discussion with Monsieur de Sacy" of 1655, after the night of fire when he was touched by grace, Pascal addresses an austere Jansenist, hostile to philosophy, the debated question being: why seek the truth by means of human reason, when it has already been revealed by the Scriptures? What use can there be for philosophy? Facing an opponent of philosophers, and even though at that time he was determined to live only for God, Pascal will show that the practice of philosophy is a privileged gateway, if not to the pursued truth, at least to the search for the God who knows it.

In Pascal's demonstrations, Epictetus and Montaigne stand for philosophy. This atypical choice (Aristotle and Descartes would have been more representative of the ambitions of philosophy) is due to their style of writing, which "is the commonest, which is most persuasive, which stays longer in the memory, and which is most often quoted, because it is entirely composed of thoughts born out of ordinary, everyday conversations,"[14] a lively style that Pascal enjoyed emulating and that suited his rejection of systematizing as well as his "realism," his concern for never leaving reality behind and for learning from experience. To Pascal, all of Descartes's

philosophy would be like "the novel of nature, more or less similar to Don Quixote's tale."[15] Above all, the major mistake of the Aristotelian and of the Cartesian systems is that of conceiving God as an abstract principle, a metaphysical entity that has nothing to say to us about the chief point: who we are and what we ought to do.

These two philosophers, Epictetus and Montaigne, have addressed these questions, which are burning issues for any sensible person. Together, they stand for the truths about man disclosed by philosophy but also for the impossibility of synthesizing them: they are conflicting truths. The former, Epictetus, provides instructions for life during hard times; he was a first century AD slave and a Stoic, for whom man is sovereign through his thought. The universe of the Stoics is organized by a God, which the Renaissance identified with the Christian God. In order to lead a happy life, one must "want what God wants"; the Stoic sage knows what his duties are. He has perfectly understood what one must *want to do* so as to unite with God, but, according to Pascal, he "becomes lost in the presumption of what we are able to do."[16] Pascal would borrow from Epictetus this indisputable sign of human greatness: thought, but, as a disciple of Saint Augustine, he finds the assumption that our own forces might suffice to be a *presumptuous* one. Like the honorable person that he would address in his future "Apology," Pascal is a great reader of Montaigne, whom he has paraphrased a lot: "It is not in Montaigne, but in myself that I find everything I see there."[17] And, in this pure "Pyrrhonist,"[18] he found the truth on man's "powerlessness." Unfortunately, by describing a man deprived of God and lacking any means of getting closer to him, Montaigne threw in his lot with a carefree attitude and with resting on "the soft pillow of doubt." Pascal contrasts Montaigne's *cowardice* to Epictetus's *presumption*.[19]

Thus, before M. de Sacy, Pascal begins to outline his anthropology, or, rather, the impossibility of a unified discourse on man, the very impossibility of a philosophical anthropology. This is not about renouncing philosophical truths, as they are unassailable truths learned from experience ("So it is wretched to know one is wretched, but there is greatness in the knowledge of one's wretchedness"),[20] but no philosophy can know man, who remains a mystery to himself; all that they each can see is but a part of him. By stating that, with Epictetus, man experiences his greatness, and

that, with Montaigne, he only experiences his wretchedness, Pascal exposes the "contrarieties" of human nature; in a Girardian language, these contradictions are *reflected* but not *revealed* by philosophy, which is unable to decipher the *double nature* of man.

Let us take a Girardian look at this Pascalian duel between the dogmatic philosopher, accused of *presumption*, and the skeptical one, guilty of *cowardice*. The symmetry of their respective positions calls to mind the Girardian definition of the tragic dialogue as an "opposition of symmetrical elements."[21] The more the protagonists see themselves as separated by a tremendous difference, the more alike they are, enemy brothers killing each other. Pascal was turned into a *tragic thinker* precisely because, according to him, there can be no possible reconciliation of opposites. There is only a "constant switch between for and against."[22] Thus, before a cleric opposed to philosophy, Pascal states his adherence to the truths that philosophy establishes, while revealing their tragic nature; they wage war on each other, each of them tends to destroy the other, it is a hopeless conflict. Pascal will use this philosophical oscillation between pride and despair in order to shake the libertine up: "If he praises himself, I belittle him. / If he belittles himself, I praise him / And continue to contradict him / Until he understands / That he is an unfathomable monster."[23]

The Double Nature of Man

Why should we understand ourselves as "unfathomable monsters"? Because the educated public that Pascal addresses in the *Pensées*, inebriated by the scientific revolution that came to fruition under its eyes, tends to emancipate itself from religion and prepares the thought of the Enlightenment, a thought according to which the all-powerful human reason is like the sun dispelling darkness, capable of progressively achieving the conditions of a happiness on earth. This optimism, laying the foundations for a century of revolutions, stems from a blindness of man regarding himself. In that respect, Pascal's efforts in order to substitute a lucid reason to a conquering reason tend toward this anthropology that is yet to come into being, an objective study of man and of his determinants. Meanwhile, in his discussion with Sacy, Pascal will show that he is not a

tragic thinker, that there is a point of view from which everything becomes clearer.[24]

He will, indeed, explain that philosophy can only achieve its ambitions through self-denial, by becoming theology. It is impossible to reconcile the *contrarieties* of man and, therefore, those of the two philosophies, which—since one of them establishes certainty, and the other, doubt; one of them, man's greatness, and the other, his weakness—undermine each other. Only the truth of the Gospel "brings together differences through a wholly divine skill. . . . And the reason for this is that these wise men of the world place opposites in the same subject, one attributing greatness to nature, the other weakness to the very same nature, two views which could not subsist together, instead of which faith teaches us to situate them in different subjects, with all weakness assigned to nature, all strengths to grace."[25]

Pascal, with his original, inventive way of imitating,[26] does not only draw from Montaigne in order to describe the "wretchedness of man without God";[27] he also borrows a lot from Saint Augustine. According to Christian doctrine, after the Fall, men would no longer be in the state in which God had created them: "They retain some ineffective inkling of the happiness of their first nature, and they are sunk in the wretchednesses of their blindness, and of their concupiscence which has become their second nature."[28] The great themes of the *Pensées* are Augustinian: the double nature of man, original sin, the centrality of desire (concupiscence), the mystery of grace, the mediation of Jesus Christ who is the only source of redemption and of salvation. All of these themes inhabit the anthropological work of René Girard, who is also indebted to Augustine: "Today there is a tendency to forget the deep anthropological intuitiveness of Christian tradition. This is why, from a traditional point of view, I probably represent an Augustinian reaction against an excess of humanism."[29]

Original Sin

In stark contrast to a past, present, or future "humanism," Pascal calls out to the libertine in this magnificent burst of eloquence, an excerpt from a long fragment of the *Pensées*:

> What a figment of the imagination human beings are! What a novelty, what monsters! Chaotic, contradictory, prodigious, judging everything, mindless worm of the earth, storehouse of truth, cesspool of uncertainty and error, glory and reject of the universe.
>
> Who will unravel this tangle? . . .
>
> Nature confounds Pyrrhonists and reason confounds dogmatists. What will then become of you, men who are looking for your true condition through your natural reason? You cannot avoid one of these sects nor survive in either.
>
> Be aware then, proud men, what a paradox you are to yourselves! Be silent, foolish nature! Learn that humanity infinitely transcends humanity and hear from your Master your true condition of which you are unaware.
>
> Listen to God.
>
> Is it not as clear as day that man's condition is twofold? Indisputably. For in the end, if man had never been corrupted, he would enjoy in his innocent state both truth and happiness with confidence. And if man had never been other than corrupted, he would have no notion of either truth or beatitude. But in the wretched state in which we are, more wretched even than if there were no dignity in our condition, we have an idea of happiness and we cannot achieve it, we feel an image of truth and we possess only untruth. We are incapable both of total ignorance and certain knowledge, so obvious is it that we were once in a state of perfection from which we have unhappily fallen.[30]

Pascal goes on to write, concerning the doctrine of original sin, Adam's sin stemming from the desire to be "like God," the sin lying at the root of his "fall" into a corrupt nature, the sin of pride passed on from one generation to the next in a more than mysterious way: "Certainly nothing shocks us more deeply than this doctrine. Nevertheless, without this most incomprehensible of all mysteries we are incomprehensible to ourselves. Within this gnarled chasm lie the twists and turns of our condition. So, humanity is more inconceivable without this mystery than this mystery is conceivable to humanity."[31]

Reading this text over René Girard's shoulder means feeling a double emotion: admiration in front of its power and its beauty, as well as a feeling of gratitude toward René Girard, who has familiarized us with this mystery. Thanks to his anthropology of violence and of religion, we can finally appropriate Adam's sin. Indeed, is not original sin something akin to this "*metaphysical desire*" referenced to in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, René Girard's first book, already informed by his Christianity? There is no need whatsoever of an act of faith in order to accept the idea that this sin, desiring the being of an Other, is "original" and transmittable: is the feeling of "lacking being" not inherent to an animal become aware of its own finiteness? Girard posits the scientific hypothesis that the force of dissemination of desire, in the form of "mimetic desire," lies at the origins of humanity. But for this desire, shaped by the hyper-mimicry of a hominid,

and but for all that ensued, rivalries, violence, surrogate victim, sacrificial rites, taboos, and myths, we would not have emerged from the natural world; there would have been no religions, therefore, no cultures, no humanity. Mimetic desire, until the foundational murder, is the sin lying at the origins of man. "There is no other man than the man of the Fall."[32]

Divine Grace

In the same way that we only know our wretchedness due to a remnant of greatness still within ourselves, we only know ourselves and God through the mediation of God Incarnate, Jesus Christ, *the redeemer of our wretchedness*. Hence, Pascal writes, "we can only know God fully by knowing our own iniquities,"[33] which is reminiscent of Saint Paul's conversion. Therefore, these two truths, sin and grace, incomprehensible for reason, only accessible through faith, must be kept together. "The whole of faith consists in Jesus Christ and Adam, and the whole of moral activity in the workings of concupiscence and grace."[34] The fact remains that Adam's sin is natural and it inhabits the whole of mankind, whereas divine grace is supernatural and it is a gift from God. It is only reserved for the "elect," and it is not even calculated on merit. It is a free gift. Augustine opposed the Pelagians and Pascal the Jesuits, guilty, in their view, of overestimating human freedom and its power to resist the lure of sin: man cannot obtain his salvation without the help of divine grace.[35]

One thorny question becomes pressing: if only God's grace allows the (honorable) man to convert, what meaning can an apologetics have? Pascal, just like Girard, attaches little importance to metaphysical proof; their God is the biblical God and especially the God of the Gospel, the God Incarnate, but the apology for religion is an undertaking that appeals to experience and to reason, human faculties barely capable of unraveling the tangle of natural causes, so, Pascal says, how can it deal with the supernatural ones? The "Discussion with Monsieur de Sacy" has shown that the Pascalian philosophical anthropology can only solve the contradictions with which it is saturated by being "carried away . . . into theology,"[36] which is "uniting all truths."[37] Above all, Pascal knows that he addresses human beings, whose hearts needs to be touched even more than their reason. Now, according to him, the heart is not only the seat of desires; it is also a means

of knowledge. “The heart feels that there are three dimensions in space and that there is an infinite series of numbers, and then reason goes on to prove . . .”[38] The inability of reason to prove its first principles reveals that it is not sovereign, that it is not capable, on its own, of instructing us. “God felt by the heart, not by reason.”[39] After all, as seen in the case of the previously quoted text (“What a figment . . . !”), Pascal is less trying to *instruct* his readers (this is the main difference between him and Girard) than to *excite* them, to put them in a state of unrest. But he also knows that “the will is one of the principal organs of belief, not because it creates belief, but because things are true or false according to the aspect by which we judge them.”[40] The will of a corrupt nature is weak in front of the lure of pleasure. Pascal will go as far as to subject religious truths to a charm related to concupiscence: religion must become pleasant; one must make people want to love God.

Love of God and Self-Love

It is a truth learned from experience, that “all men are in search of happiness. There is no exception to this, whatever different methods are employed. . . . The will never takes the slightest step except with that aim. This is the motive for men’s every action, even those who are going to hang themselves.”[41] The continuation of this text might surprise, as it is Girardian, and one can see arising in it the envious nature of our appetites, that is, mimetic desire:

> Some seek the true good in authority, some in the intellectual quest for knowledge, yet others in pleasures.
>
> Yet others, who indeed have come closest to it, thought that the universal good which we all desire could not lie within any single thing which can be owned only by one person and which, if it is shared, *causes more distress to its owner over the part the owner is denied than enjoyment over the part the owner has*. They have understood that true good needs to be such that everyone could possess it at the same time, *without diminution or envy*, and that no one could lose it against his will.[42]

The text is incomplete.

One can recognize in the first lines the three “concupiscences” according to Augustine, the desires for power, for knowledge, and for pleasure.[43] These desires are defined by their object and as if magnetized by it. The

continuation of the text describes our incapacity to achieve happiness. At best, one can get closer to it, but, surprise, those having approached it the most will have learned that disappointment does not stem from the fact that the target object would be a "false good"; it arises from the jealousy and from the envy that one feels for one's rivals, be it a matter of authority, of sciences, or of material goods. Pascal does not go as far as to think that imitation guides and reinforces desires, even if he does elsewhere emphasize the weight of education and of example, but he acknowledges the fact that the enjoyment of a specific good can be ruined by comparison; then, the highest good would be the one that we could apportion in such a way that some people's share cannot diminish other people's or anyone's share, a good that everyone could own *without diminution or envy*. In Pascal's anthropology, envy is not ascribed the central place that it holds in Shakespeare's plays, but he is using it here in order to distinguish between two types of love: the envious and jealous love, that makes one unhappy, and the love of God, the only kind of love that, when shared, cannot undergo any diminution, because it is infinite, and, therefore, it is the only one capable of fulfilling each and every person's desire for happiness.

In the *Pensées*, Pascal asks himself over and over again: if the human heart (that of the honorable person that he is addressing) can only find truth and happiness in God, then why does it feel such revulsion towards religion, why does it gravitate towards so many disappointing objects as if they were the highest good? The answer is always the same, and it is a theological one.

> The truth covered by this mystery is that God has created man with two loves, the one for God, the other for himself; but with this law, that the love for God shall be infinite, that is without any other limits than God himself; and that the love for self shall be finite and relating to God. / Man in this state not only loves himself without sin but could not do otherwise than love himself without sin. / Since, sin being come, man has lost the first of these loves; and the love for himself being left alone in this great soul capable of infinite love, this self-love has extended and overflowed in the empty space which the love of God has quitted—and thus he loves himself alone, and all things for himself, that is, infinitely.[44]

To Pascal, as to Augustine, "we are full of concupiscence, and we are therefore full of evil."[45] And the source of this evil is self-love. But does man really love himself so much? The great modern novelists have revealed that, behind the romantic character who "inflates his Self to match the proportions of the Universe," there is always a hidden mediation. Mimetic

desire, predating everyone's "self," is a relationship with the other, the model: the frog wants to be as big as the ox. Why did this truth learned from experience elude Pascal? In a conversation, Girard notes: "It's clear there was something missing in his life: he never had any trouble getting along with people. And even though his youthful brilliance aroused jealousy, he never experienced rivalry, even in science."[46] Girard is here Pascalian: he adopts the idea according to which "the heart has its reasons." Indeed, the intuition of the rivalrous nature of desire, the mimetic hypothesis, is not a truth obtained through the use of reason, but one learned from experience and coming from the heart. Undoubtedly, Pascal did not have the opportunity to experience the *sad passions* that his contemporaries have analyzed so well. But, nevertheless, as an analyst of the contradictions, of the paradoxes, and of the sundry absurdities that create the "wretchedness of man without God," he spotted a surprising contradiction in this egocentric megalomaniac: while relating everything to himself, man never stops wanting to escape himself, to step outside himself.

To Seek Repose through Activity, the Diversion

Undeniably, Pascalian diversion [*divertissement*] is what most closely resembles "metaphysical" desire according to Girard, the desire to be someone else while still being oneself, a centrifugal and an infinite desire, since it is constantly frustrated. One dons a multiplicity of characters; one refuses to "return to oneself," for fear of being forced to confront the void. Therefore, far from being occasional, having a beginning and an end, the diversion is endless: "The whole of life goes on like this. We seek repose by battling against difficulties, and once they are overcome, repose becomes unbearable."[47] To divert oneself means to turn away from oneself, *to forget oneself* by chasing after a ball, by doing business, or by trying to solve a geometry problem. Man needs to stay busy, no matter how. He cannot be without noise and without diversion, Pascal states, but what is this happiness consisting of being diverted from thinking about oneself? "If our condition were truly happy, we should not have to divert ourselves from thinking about it."[48] Hence, the happiness of being diverted from oneself consists of not being wretched, and, since this is a matter of forgetting about *one's human condition* (death, the miseries of life, ignorance), no one

escapes this necessity: “A king without distraction is a man full of wretchednesses.”[49]

Pascal is scandalized by those among his contemporaries, quite numerous among the libertines, who manage to divert themselves so well that worrying about their salvation does not even cross their mind. At the end of a long text where he suspects these “strong minds” of feigning indifference out of vanity, of having, in fact, the weakness of following a fashion (mimetic desire is right there!), the apologist returns to his duty of charity.

> We need, he says, all the charity of that religion they despise not to despise them to the extent of abandoning them to their foolishness. But because this religion obliges us always to look on them, as long as they live, as being capable of the grace which can enlighten them, and to believe that in a short while they can be filled with more faith than ourselves, and that we on the other hand can fall into the blindness where they are now, we must do for them what we would want others to do for us if we were in their place, and appeal to them to have pity on themselves and take at least a few steps to see whether they cannot find enlightenment.[50]

Pascal answers here the question of the meaning to be given to his apology as a philosopher and as a Christian. As a philosopher, he places human beings on an equal ontological footing. As a Christian, he makes this equality a “reversing” one, because at any moment each may become the other: the unbeliever is “*capable of the grace*,” that is, liable to receive it without having deserved it; as for the believer, he may revert to blindness. There are no elect on one side and reprobates on the other; there are only sin and grace, which are our condition, wherein Christian freedom has its source. Moreover, Christian charity is shown here as the exact opposite of self-centered concupiscence: it consists of putting oneself in the other’s position, of doing for him what we would like him to do for us.

The postulate of a Christian anthropology is that all people, simply by virtue of their humanity, are called to take part in the divine life. Since diversion constitutes the bulk of human life, Pascal does not condemn it.[51] No more so than Girard condemns mimesis, which he places before diversion. In the absence of this *distraction from oneself*, in the absence of the dynamism of the *passions*, there would be no cultures, no societies, no progress of knowledge, we would be angels or beasts, and we would have no history. Through this notion of diversion, which encompasses *all* human occupations, Pascalian anthropology tunes in with mimetic theory. *To seek*

repose through activity, such is the adventurous life of Don Quixote, a "loser" and a hero of modern times. On his deathbed, Cervantes's character inaugurates what will be, to Girard, a *novelistic conversion*: he understands that all his life was wasted on the lies of pride, he realizes that he had mistaken his Christian freedom for idolatry, the worst of all servitudes, and he returns to himself, that is, to that part of "divine life" that his desire for glory had previously overshadowed.

What Is the Self?

To return to oneself, to distract oneself from oneself: what is, then, this "self" that one supposedly serves through self-diversion?[52] Pascal makes his reader face the impossibility of answering this question. The "self" has no being, just qualities ("which do not make up the self, since they are perishable").[53] This leads to the bitter conclusion: "Therefore we never love a person, only qualities."[54]

Obviously, *myself* is myself. *THE* self is an idol. Idolatry consists of placing infinity within a finite thing. The idolatry of the "self" has Girardian undertones, except that Girard lays emphasis on the relationship between the self and the others, where everything takes place. Inside the universe of *internal mediation*, by copying each other, the disciples and the models make their "being" dependent on the others' gaze and, in this "*vast middle-class court where the courtiers are everywhere and the king is nowhere*,"[55] everyone exhausts themselves trying to steal a ghost royalty from their neighbor.

However, nothing brings Girardian anthropology closer to the Pascalian one than their shared radical critique of a sovereign "self." By uncovering the lie behind the "freest" attitudes, by revealing the fact that individualism is a lie, Girard could well have written: "Mankind is therefore nothing but disguise, lies, and hypocrisy, both as individuals and with regard to others."[56] Girard turned Descartes, with his foundational *Cogito*, into the first philosopher of individualism.[57] He could have seen in Pascal, with his "*hateful self*," the first anti-individualist philosopher, the first to have foreseen the darkness that would accompany the "lights" of rationalism, with the outburst of the Revolution and the triumph of free competition.

So much does the "self" love itself, that it does not cease escaping itself through diversion or through the fascination of the models/obstacles. Hence, lying to oneself is constitutive of the cult of the "self." How could Girard not agree with the Pascalian conclusion about man's aversion to truth? "There are different degrees in this aversion for the truth; but we can say that it is in everyone to some degree, because it is inseparable from self-love."[58] And, before Nietzsche and Girard, Pascal discovers ressentiment, that paradoxical truth according to which self-hatred and vanity support each other within the fallen man:

> The nature of self-love and of this human self is to love only self and consider only self. But what is it to do? It cannot prevent this object it loves from being full of shortcomings and wretchedness; it wants to be great and sees that it is small; it wants to be happy and sees that it is wretched; it wants to be perfect and sees that it is full of imperfections; it wants to be the object of people's love and esteem and sees that its shortcomings merit only their dislike and their contempt.[59]

Echoing this comment, Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, as quoted by Girard, comes to mind: "a cultivated and decent man cannot be vain without setting a fearfully high standard for himself, and without despising and almost hating himself at certain moments."[60]

Nevertheless, the self-hatred advocated by Pascal has nothing to do with ressentiment. Quite the contrary, it must rid us of it. In Girardian terms, one will say that human freedom consists of choosing between the human model and the divine one. "We must love only God and hate only ourselves."[61] One can only love oneself in God. In order to know what kind of love one owes to oneself, Pascal, undoubtedly inspired by the epistles of Saint Paul, imagines "a body full of thinking members":[62] if the foot or the hand ignores its dependence on the body and if it assumes being a whole,

> having no principle of life in itself, it only becomes lost and bewildered at the uncertainty of its existence, quite aware that it is not a body, yet not seeing that it is a member of a body. Eventually, when it comes to know itself, it is as if it had come home, and only loves itself from then on as part of the body. . . . By its own nature it could not love anything other than for itself and to make that thing subject to itself, because everything loves itself more than anything else. But in loving the body it loves itself, because it has no being except in itself, through itself and for itself.[63]

To the Christian, this body is Jesus Christ, one loves oneself because one is a member of Jesus Christ. The Christian Republic is organized by two

laws only: the love of God and the love of one's neighbor.[64] Unfortunately, the earthly city needs, in order to be governed, a much larger number of rules. The problem to be solved is that of having the members of this body, each of whom, "by its own nature it could not love anything other than for itself and to make that thing subject to itself," live together in a "social body." Pascal's political thought is an implacable force because it leaves no room for "ideas," sticking only to facts. One can find there, in a factual state, violence according to Girard, which both threatens the cities with death, *essential* violence (civil war), and provides their relative stability, *sacrificial violence* (justice).

Justice, Might

Man is great "even in his concupiscence, from having known how to draw an admirable moral order from it and make it into an image of charity."[65] Indeed, in a civilized state, honorable people behave toward each other as if they loved each other. But concupiscence and charity are exact opposites. If, indeed, the honorable man "*inconveniences himself*" for the others, his "self" remains central. By taking away his inconvenience, he does not abolish his injustice. He makes his "self" pleasing to the unjust and thus stays unjust himself.[66] This "picture of charity" is a trompe-l'œil, but, without this trompe-l'œil, there would be no social life.

To summarize Pascal's political thought: "Concupiscence and force are the basis of all our actions. Concupiscence causes voluntary actions, force involuntary ones."[67] Force is physical; it will always prevail, without question. But, in order to establish its reign for the long term, it must pass itself off as "just." Justice would also need force so as to defend itself against the unjust, but it has a spiritual nature; it is "subject to debate." It is force, not justice, that achieves unanimous approval: "So, having been unable to strengthen justice, we have justified strength."[68]

In the *Pensées*, Pascal does not speak about *violence* but about *force*.[69] These notions are not of the same kind. Force is a fact. Its opposite is weakness. It is physical, even if, in the human order, it is often relayed by imagination and by opinion. Violence has a spiritual dimension that makes it similar to injustice and the opposite of justice. By making violence an effect of mimetic desire and of rivalry, René Girard dealt with an

anthropological phenomenon: violence only concerns human relations or what relates to humanity. Now, Pascal does not deal with human relations in the city as a moralist but as a physicist: they are relationships among forces, that is, facts. Thus: "Why do we follow the majority? Is it because they are more right? No, but stronger."[70] Or: "Justice, like finery, is dictated by fashion."[71] After all, justice itself is a fact like any other: "Justice is what is established. And so all our established laws will necessarily be held to be just without examination, since they are established."[72]

The Christian cynicism, shared by both Pascal and Girard, consists less of "revealing" the true nature and origin of institutions than of refusing to differentiate between them. From the standpoint of divine justice, all human laws are of equal merit, and they are only worth abiding by. If, Pascal says, Plato and Aristotle "wrote about politics, it was as if to provide rules for a madhouse."[73] For instance, is it reasonable to choose as a ruler the firstborn son of a queen? However, "the worst evil of all is civil war. They are safe, if a reward for merit is sought, *because everyone will say they have merit.* The evil to fear when a fool succeeds through right of birth is neither so great, nor so certain."[74]

A Girardian framework of interpretation helps us understand this paradox in the Pascalian vision of politics: his complete skepticism toward political institutions and an equally radical "conservatism." Does this not amount to seeing that, in a "madhouse," the *sacrificial violence* of absurd or unjust laws keeps the *essential violence* represented by a fratricidal civil war at bay? Here, Pascal sees clearly that the institutions *contain* violence, in both senses of the word.

Therefore, as pointed out by Girard, it is significant that, at the end of "Provincial Letter XII," Pascal contrasts *violence* with *truth*.[75] At first glance, violence and truth do not belong together, not even as warring opposites. To Pascal, for whom truth can be found on the Jansenist side, this is about denouncing a state-conducted violence, a *tyranny*, "wanting to have something in one way when it can only be had in another."[76] To Girard, there is a *truth of violence*, the evangelical and anthropological revelation of the scapegoat, and a *violence of truth*, which destabilizes the human orders based on the lie. By reversing the terms,[77] Girard would want the mutual intensification of violence and truth described by Pascal to be an "already apocalyptic thought." Nonetheless, *the fleetingness of the* Pensées *does not*

allow one to understand history.[78] In Pascal, there is no "escalation to extremes." Because violence and truth are not equal, they are not of the same kind: "for there is the *enormous difference that the course of violence is limited by the decree of God*, who applies its effects to the glory of the truth it attacks, whereas truth exists eternally and finally triumphs over its enemies, because it is eternal and mighty as God himself."[79]

The Three Orders

Pascal's genius as a philosopher consists of having put reason at the service of its own critique, preceding Kant in this undertaking. Thus, the distinction among orders: *the order of greatness* (the social order), *the order of the mind* (reason and the sciences), and *the order of charity* (faith and religion).[80] This distinction is extremely rational, while still allotting its own remit—which is neither that of "greatness of establishment," nor that of supernatural revelation—to reason. Nevertheless, to have in fine submitted itself to the revelation would not mean that reason would disown itself, but, contrariwise, that it would put its force to the test, opening itself to truths that do not originate from it: "Submission . . . [We must know] where to doubt, where to affirm and where to submit when necessary. Whoever does not do this does not understand *the force of reason*."[81]

In order to "figure" the infinite distance between reason and faith, one must think about the distance between a billionaire and a Nobel laureate. That between the genius and the saint is even more infinite![82] These three orders—the social order, the order of science, the order of charity—are radically separate:

> The infinite distance between body and mind points to the infinitely more infinite distance between mind and charity, for charity is supernatural. All the brilliance of greatness has no attraction for people who are involved in pursuits of the mind. The greatness of intellectual people is invisible to kings, the rich, captains, to all those great in a material sense. The greatness of wisdom, which is nothing if it does not come from God, is invisible to carnal and to intellectual people. They are three different orders. Of kind . . . All bodies, the firmament, the stars, the earth, and its kingdoms are not worth the lowest of minds. For it knows all of them, and itself, and bodies know nothing. All bodies together, and all minds together, and all their products are not worth the least impulse of charity. That is of an infinitely higher order. Out of all bodies together we could not succeed in making one little thought. It is impossible, and of another order. Out of all bodies and minds we could not draw one impulse of true charity. It is impossible, and of another, supernatural, order.[83]

This “fragment 339” is essential: the doctrine of the three orders can be found throughout the *Pensées*. What Nietzsche had admired so much in Pascal, that “*switch between for and against*,” the importance of the “point of view” in order to access reality, is here the idea that some people’s *visible* stays *invisible* to other people. But we are far from relativism: there is a hierarchy of the orders. And, if the lower order is blind to everything that is obvious to the higher order, if the eyes of the flesh do not see the truths of the mind, if reason withdraws in front of the mysteries of faith, nothing is invisible to the highest order, the order of charity. Thus, concerning the *order of greatness*, from the opinion of the rank and file to that of the “perfect Christians,” the opinions of those of middling intelligence, of clever men, and of the devout follow one another from for to against, but there is a *gradation*, “depending on how much understanding you have.”[84] And, regarding the Revelation, Pascal thinks that “God . . . wanted to blind some and enlighten others: The carnal Jews [did not recognize the Messiah foretold by their prophecies], they misunderstood him in his humiliation and in his death; they only looked in him for a carnal greatness.”[85]

Even if they both think that one should not separate the New Testament from the Old, Girard reproached Pascal for considering “prophecy as a kind of mechanical code, a sort of puzzle that only Christians are able to solve because they have the key to it. The Jews, on the other hand, are accounted as understanding nothing about their own texts because they don’t possess this key, which is the very person of Christ.”[86] In his anthropological perspective, Girard shows that the revelation of the victim’s innocence occurs very frequently in the Hebrew Bible, and especially in the prophets. Pascal, in his apologetic perspective, uses these “carnal Jews” blindness to the fulfillment of their prophecies as *proof* of the truth of Christianity.[87]

Nevertheless, the Christian reading of the Bible has its roots in the Revelation: this is the light source that turns the Joseph of the Genesis into a “*figura Christi*,” both for Pascal and for Girard.[88] A *figurative* reading of the Bible, a deciphering of the truths that it reveals or that it prophesies, is only made possible by the *literal*, and then by the *spiritual* reading of the revelation in words and in acts contained within the Gospels. Thus, “the infinite distance between body and mind *points to* [*figure*] the infinitely more infinite distance between mind and charity”:[89] reaching faith starting

from reason is impossible, but the light of the higher order can fall on the lower orders and allow one to see them in their truth. The Girardian apology for Christianity confirms this: Girard states that *mimetic theory is not his own invention*, but that, in fact, it stems from the Bible, which contains it in its entirety. Like Pascal, he saw that the evangelical revelation allows one to understand not only what comes *after* but also what comes *before* Jesus Christ.[90] "The two Testaments look to Jesus Christ, the Old as its expectation and the New as its model, and both have him as their centre."[91]

Low Doorway, Huge Vault

Pascal could have agreed with the idea according to which the Gospels would be a discourse on man to the same extent as a discourse on God: "not only is it through Jesus Christ alone that we know God but it is only through Jesus Christ that we know ourselves."[92] Anthropology is a rational endeavor illuminated by the Revelation: to Girard, becoming less blind means discovering that one is a persecutor ("Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in the darkness");[93] to Pascal, "you have to love . . . in order to know . . . and . . . you enter into truth only by charity."[94]

Jesus Christ is the God of the Christians. Pascal uses all the resources of demonstrative reason in order to prove that not only is he the *true* God, just as Christianity is the *true* religion, but that, without the mediation of the God Incarnate, there is no possible communication with God. Philosophers went astray, assuming that they could have known God without knowing the corruption of their own nature: instead of glorifying God, they have glorified themselves for it. Atheists also lose their way, for the knowledge of their wretchedness without the faith in a Redeemer reduces them to despair. Only the Christian religion, focused on love and mercy, reveals the true nature of man and "*the greatness of his wretchedness through the greatness of the remedy which was required*."[95] We only know God through Jesus Christ because we can only know God well by knowing our own iniquities. We are here very close to Girardian anthropology. And we are even closer to it here: "*Without Jesus Christ the world would not exist, for it would either have to be destroyed or it would be a kind of hell*."[96]

Christ being God for all eternity, Pascal thinks that *the true religion has always been on earth*, because Christ is promised since the beginning of the world.[97] He is heralded by the prophets and prefigured in the history of Israel. Jewish Law is the *figure* of the Christian message. As a physicist, Pascal deems prophecies to be the most tangible *proof* of Christ's divinity: just like scientific hypotheses, they have been confirmed by very real events. However, reading the Scripture starting from Jesus Christ does not mean reaching its truth through reason but through faith. This will be René Girard's approach.[98]

"Low doorway, huge vault"—undoubtedly, Pascal is having this beautiful metaphor by Saint Augustine in mind when he remarks: "Jesus Christ and St Paul have the order of charity, not of the intellect, for they wanted to edify, not to instruct. St Augustine the same."[99] In order to hear God's word, reason must humble itself. The God of the Bible is a *hidden God*, in the sense that he does not appear in an obvious way (this would make faith unnecessary), but only to those who seek him.[100] Even the *Mediator*, Jesus, the key to the Scriptures, is a hidden God. His royalty is invisible to the eyes of the flesh and of the mind; he died on the Cross like a criminal. "Low doorway": the mind must submit itself to a higher order, charity, from where it discovers the meaning of the contradictions of the human condition, and the "huge vault" of beauties hitherto unseen. It is, indeed, a conversion.

If reason humbles itself, it is so as to be able to reach a "state of grace" or the state capable of receiving grace. The doctrine of the three orders is indispensable in order to understand that, for reason, renouncing its sovereignty does not equal renouncing itself, but that, on the contrary, it means a strengthening of its position by staying within its order. "Tyranny consists in the universal desire to dominate, beyond one's station."[101] In his last work, René Girard is looking for a reason that would stop being *tyrannical*, which makes it blind to *deciphering the signs of the times*. Reason cannot do everything; neither can science. Human relations, which, for the best and often for the worst, are not rational, must be taken into account. The new rationality that mimetic theory would like to promote presents itself as "apocalyptic," "because it takes the divine seriously."[102] This *expanded reason* is Pascalian: it acknowledges the truth of original sin, which, according to Girard, reveals itself in the *folds* and in the *turns* of the

foundational murder; it bows down before the mystery of grace, the only one capable of turning the "escalation to extremes" into its opposite: the coming of the Kingdom.

At the end of his first book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard writes that "all the great works are composed like cathedrals." Both the Pascalian cathedral and the Girardian cathedral are Gothic cathedrals. Unlike Romanesque cathedrals, whose point of rest are their very solid foundations (Descartes's philosophy is a Romanesque cathedral), the fulcrum of Gothic cathedrals is located at the summit of the vault, that "indivisible point" which is its keystone, the piece holding together all the rest of the building. To Pascal and to Girard, Jesus Christ is this keystone, in whose absence everything falls apart. Unfortunately, "nothing is so like charity as cupidity, and nothing is so contrary."[103] Therefore, cupidity (in Girardian terms, the *diverted* transcendence of "metaphysical desire") has replaced charity (the vertical transcendence of divine love), and it has greatly weakened our earthly buildings by wanting to make them soar up to the heavens. In mimetic theory, the Passion of Jesus takes on an anthropological meaning: the Cross represents God's love, but also the hate of the people, their rejection of the peace offered by Jesus, a peace that *surpasses human* understanding, since it is not based on violence, but on forgiveness.[104] Girard connects the rejection of the Kingdom and the apocalyptic texts of the Gospels, whose distressing topicality he shows. Girard and Pascal are separated by three centuries of acceleration of history: whereas Girard concludes that Christianity has failed, Pascal bases his apologetics on its continued existence. Truth *is eternal and mighty as God himself*.

Let us conclude. There is so much affinity between mimetic theory and the *Pensées*, that the fact that Girard himself has only left us scattered fragments of his relationship with Pascal is unfortunate. Some of them are spicy.[105] But one must also admit that Girard's scientific anthropology could not have drawn from Pascal's existential style, personally urging his reader to worry about the salvation of his soul. Mimetic theory has its roots in history, revealing the violence that has made it possible and what risks putting an end to it: a global civil war. Why should one read Pascal, who is so unrelated to secular history? Historic destiny is collective, but conversion stays a personal adventure. And who could make us better feel the infinite pain of an abandoned God,[106] Jesus at Gethsemane, suffering through the horror of that night preceding his Passion, while his disciples are asleep,

than Pascal? “Jesus will be in agony even to the end of the world. We must not sleep during that time.”[107] Who better than Pascal to keep us awake?

NOTES

1. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 150–52.

2. Ibid., 70 (#230).

3. Ibid., 73 (#233).

4. Ibid., 158 (#680).

5. Ibid., 66 (#230).

6. Ibid., 72 (#231).

7. After his death, a parchment, the “Memorial,” on which he had set down his memory of this “fire,” was found.

8. Pascal wrote the *Provincial Letters* at the request of his Jansenist friends, in order to publicize unfair trials, a battle lost in advance against the Jesuits and the royal power. This polemical work is a literary masterpiece.

9. Blaise Pascal, *The Provincial Letters*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1967), 42.

10. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 119.

11. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, 62 (#214).

12. “We absolutely need Pascal. He saw and immediately understood the ‘abysses’ of foundation.” Girard, *Battling to the End*, 22, 191. The epigraph of the book (omitted in the English edition) is the text at the end of *Provincial Letter XII*: “It is a long strange war when violence tries to suppress truth. All the efforts of violence cannot weaken truth, and only serve to reinforce it. All the enlightenment of truth can do nothing to halt violence and only exasperates it more.” See Blaise Pascal, *The Provincial Letters*, 191–92.

13. Pascal, *Pensées*, 152 (#671).

14. Ibid., 136 (#618).

15. Reported statements, Lafuma (from now on L.), 1008 (my translation). The reader of Girard will appreciate: Cartesian science would be the work of fiction dreamed up by a madman, whose madness would reside in believing in the sovereignty of reason.

16. Pascal, “Discussion with Monsieur de Sacy,” in Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, 183 (#14).

17. Pascal, *Pensées*, 131 (#568).

18. The Pyrrhonists, disciples of Pyrrho of Elis, are skeptical philosophers, not knowing either that they know or that they ignore, whence Montaigne’s famous “What do I know?”

19. Girard went even further: “Montaigne, on the other hand, was too happy, too untroubled. Montaigne really prefigures the French bourgeois who has tasted success—the rat in his cheese, as one might say.” René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 124. Nonchalance is unbearable to “those who search in anguish.”

20. Pascal, *Pensées*, 37 (#146).

21. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 44.

22. Pascal, *Pensées*, 31 (#127).

23. Ibid., 40 (#163).

24. Ibid., 13 (#55): "Similarly with pictures seen from too far off, or from too close up. And there is only one indivisible point which is the right position. The others are too close, too distant, too high, or too low. Perspective determines it in the art of painting. But in truth and morality who will determine it?"

25. Pascal, "Discussion," 190 (#34).

26. "The only short-cut to innovation is imitation." See René Girard, "Innovation and Repetition," *SubStance* 19, no. 2/3 (1990): 14, https://doi.org/10.2307/3684663.

27. Pascal, *Pensées*, 11 (#40).

28. Ibid., 54 (#182).

29. Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, 98.

30. Pascal, *Pensées*, 41–42 (#164).

31. Ibid., 43 (#164).

32. René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, 90.

33. Pascal, *Pensées*, 63 (#221).

34. Ibid., 78 (#258).

35. Pelagius, a fourth-century British monk, professed that man is free and capable of resisting sin. By attributing the meaning of an *anthropological revelation* to the Passion, Girard cast the suspicion of "Pelagianism" on himself.

36. Pascal, "Discussion," 190 (#35).

37. Ibid., 190 (#34).

38. Pascal, *Pensées*, 36 (#142).

39. Ibid., 157 (#680).

40. Ibid., 113 (#458).

41. Ibid., 51 (#181).

42. Ibid., 51–52 (#181). My emphasis.

43. Pascal will correlate these three desires and the three orders: the social order, the order of reason and of the sciences, and the order of the heart and of charity.

44. Blaise Pascal, "Letter to Madame Périer and Her Husband, on the Death of M. Pascal, Père (October 17, 1651)," in *The Collected Works of Blaise Pascal* (Hastings, UK: Delphi, 2020), 905.

45. Pascal, *Pensées*, 123 (#511).

46. Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, 124.

47. Pascal, *Pensées*, 46 (#168).

48. Ibid., 26 (#104).

49. Ibid., 49 (#169).

50. Ibid., 163–64 (#681).

51. Ibid., 16 (#70): "Because it is indeed depressing to be in a state of unbearable sadness as soon as you are reduced to contemplating yourself, and without distraction from doing so."

52. Ibid., 130 (#567).

53. Ibid., 131 (#567).

54. Ibid., 131 (#567).

55. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 119. Girard paraphrases Pascal.

56. Pascal, *Pensées*, 181 (#743).

57. See René Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, trans. James G. Williams (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 42–43. "In the course of its history Western individualism took over little by little the prerogatives that had belonged to God in medieval philosophy. . . . Absolute idealism and Promethean thought will push Cartesianism to its extreme consequences."

58. Pascal, *Pensées*, 180 (#743).

59. Ibid., 179 (#743).

60. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 56.

61. Pascal, *Pensées*, 91 (#405).

62. Ibid., 90 (#403).

63. Ibid., 90–91 (#404).

64. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37–40).

65. Pascal, *Pensées*, 34 (#135). Pascal, *Pensées*, 37 (#150).

66. Ibid., 119 (#494).

67. Ibid., 32 (#131).

68. Ibid., 34 (#135).

69. Except in two cases, in L. 73, to refer to the end of *Provincial Letter XII*, quoted as the epigraph of *Battling to the End*, and in L. 922, to exonerate God of the *violence* that we experience when his grace wrenches us away from the world. The pain of that wrench comes from the desires that are *unjustly* keeping us there.

70. Pascal, *Pensées*, 134 (#589).

71. Ibid., 25 (#95).

72. Ibid., 126 (#530).

73. Ibid., 112 (#457).

74. Ibid., 32 (#128). My emphasis. Mimetic rivalry lies at the root of civil wars.

75. "All the efforts of violence cannot weaken truth, and only serve to reinforce it. All the enlightenment of truth can do nothing to halt violence and only exasperates it more." Pascal, *The Provincial Letters*, 191–92.

76. Pascal, *Pensées*, 22 (#91).

77. Pascal writes: "Violence tries to suppress truth," and Girard: "I agree with Pascal that truth is essentially at war with violence." Girard, *Battling to the End*, 73.

78. As stated by Girard: "Yet the brilliance of the *Pensées* fails to describe history and its formidable capacity for regression." *Battling to the End*, 80.

79. Pascal, *The Provincial Letters*, 192. My emphasis.

80. Pascal, *Pensées*, 86 (#329).

81. Ibid., 60 (#201).

82. A distance infinitely more infinite than another is more than just rhetoric. Pascal is a geometer, but this is not the place to go into his reasons.

83. Pascal, *Pensées*, 86 (#339).

84. Pascal, *Pensées*, 31 (#124).

85. Pascal, *The Collected Works*, 449.

86. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 128.

87. Pascal, *Pensées*, 78 (#260). "What do the prophets say of Jesus Christ? That he will obviously be God? No. Rather that he is a truly hidden God, that he will be unrecognized, that no one will think he is who he is, that he will be a stumbling block for many to fall over, etc."

88. Pascal, *The Collected Works*, 443. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 149ff.

89. Pascal, *Pensées*, 86 (#339).

90. Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, 60.

91. Pascal, *Pensées*, 5 (#7).

92. Pascal, *Pensées*, 10 (#36).

93. First Epistle of Saint John, quoted in Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, 125.

94. Pascal, "The Art of Persuasion," in *Pensées and Other Writings*, 193.

95. Pascal, *Pensées*, 88 (#384).

96. Ibid., 172 (#690).

97. L. 281. For Pascal and his age, the human world is only a few thousand years old.

98. "Knowledge of a purely anthropological truth depends on faith in the Resurrection; . . . I regard conversion as a precondition of such knowledge." René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, 67.

99. Pascal, *Pensées*, 85 (#329).

100. "Grace and not reason moves those who follow it, and in those who flee it, it is concupiscence, not reason, which moves those who shun it." Ibid., 96 (#423).

101. Ibid., 23 (#92).

102. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 120.

103. Pascal, *Pensées* . . . , 122 (#508).

104. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:10–11)

105. Girard quotes a text by Nietzsche, who speaks about the "diabolical science" of Christianity, capable of making the strong perish "through orgies of self-contempt and self-abuse: that gruesome way of perishing of which Pascal provides the most famous example." Girard's comment: "Is it unfair, is it too cruel to point out that it was not Pascal who went mad but Nietzsche?" René Girard, *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 77.

106. Pascal, “The Mystery of Jesus,” in *The Collected Works of Blaise Pascal* (Hastings, UK: Delphi, 2020), 495.

107. Ibid., 495.

Baruch Spinoza

Stéphane Vinolo

> The elementary form of democracy, according to Spinoza, is lynching. And all actual societies retain a trace of this, in more refined forms, to some degree.
>
> —Alexandre Matheron, "Indignation and the Conatus of the Spinozist State," in *Politics, Ontology and Knowledge in Spinoza*

IF, AS INDICATED BY DELEUZE, A PHILOSOPHER'S VALUE IS MEASURED quantitatively by his ability to create concepts,[1] then Girard undoubtedly belongs to the great philosophical tradition. He did not only create concepts, but these concepts entered our common language and established themselves in our contemporary vocabulary. "Texts of persecution," "sacralization of violence," "scapegoat mechanism," or, paradigmatically, "mimetic desire" are all Girardian concepts, created in the context of a system of thought before becoming common usage. However, thinking about Girard's theory as it relates to philosophy or to a specific philosopher, such as Spinoza, presents two difficulties: first, Girard rejected the title of "philosopher" and thought of himself as an anthropologist interested in religion; second, and most importantly, throughout all his work, Girard criticizes philosophers for not having considered mimetic desire and its violent consequences. Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, and Rousseau, they all had intuitions about mimetic desire, but abstained from thematizing it, perhaps they were terrified by having to accept its violent and apocalyptic cost. In consequence, in his first book published in 1961, Girard wrote with certainty about the privilege novelists enjoy when it comes to unveiling the

mimetic nature of desire: "[Only] the great novelists reveal the imitative nature of desire."[2]

In the same way, in 1990, in a book Girard devotes to the works of Shakespeare, he noted that the mimetic origin of violence generated among philosophers, moralists, historians, and psychologists, nothing but a unanimous silence, *un silence unanime*.[3] We would then get an insurmountable gap between philosophy and mimetic theory, where the former is but an additional—albeit more sophisticated—tool to hide the violence and the innocence of a victim toward whom the masses direct their fury.

Girard's assertion is justified by some thinkers, but it is deemed excessive by many others. Plato's, Derrida's, and Sartre's reflections on mimetic desire are very close to Girard's.[4] What is more, supported by Deleuze, one could show that the rise of philosophy in Greece came about as a solution to the rivalries among wisdom's suitors and, therefore, as a solution to some type of mimetic violence.[5] This would imply an essential link between philosophy and mimetic theory.

In terms of proximity between mimetic theory and philosophy, the most paradigmatic case is found in the work of Spinoza. Girard's radical judgment on philosophy is perhaps explained by the fact that, while his books do mention many philosophers, we do not find in his major works even the slightest reference to the work of Spinoza. While Girard mentions Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Tocqueville, Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, Bergson, and Levinas, the name of the Dutch philosopher does not appear in any of his seminal works.

This absence is greatly surprising since Spinoza is well known, even outside academia, for being a thinker on desire: "Desire is the very essence of man."[6] Moreover, those reading Spinoza meticulously cannot leave out the fact that his *Ethics* includes a theory on the mimetic nature of affects: "From the fact that we imagine a thing like ourselves, toward which we have felt no emotion, to be affected by an emotion, we are thereby affected by a similar emotion."[7] Additionally, given that Spinoza falls within the great Cartesian tradition of the seventeenth century, he is also a mechanist who opposes the finalistic Aristotelian explanations and their hidden qualities, defining instead singular things and their relationships in a purely quantitative way.[8] We find then in Spinoza the two essential pillars from

which Girard builds his thinking: the centrality of desire and the mechanical nature of interindividual relationships. Both Girard and Spinoza believe that affects have nothing to do with the qualities of the objects but rather with the accumulation of quantitative encounters. How then could Girard forget Spinoza?

Unlike other authors, the lack of references to the Dutch philosopher in Girard's works does not allow a Girardian reading of Spinoza. However, one can find the conceptualization of the mechanics of mimetic desire and founding violence in Spinoza's texts, which illuminates retroactively and philosophically some of Girard's thoughts. More than a Girardian reading of Spinoza, we want to introduce here a cross-referenced reading of both thinkers. No one knew and experienced better than Spinoza, as we see in Girard, that the imitation of affects both builds and threatens the social order, in one single act that contains, in both senses of the word "contain," violence.

The Counterproductivity of Difference

Girard's fundamental intuitions come primarily from the field of literary criticism. He uses literature to thematize his key hypothesis, the one that constitutes the apex on which the whole inverted pyramid of the mimetic theory rests: mimetic desire.[9] One could read Girard from a philosophical, anthropological, psychological, or theological perspective; however, mimetic theory has a double preeminence, chronological and logical, in his system. This theory seems simple, and it is precisely its simple nature that caused it to be misunderstood and undervalued in the academic world. It can be summarized in a single sentence: human beings have an illusion of autonomy, making them believe they choose freely their objects of desire, when all desires are no more than imitations, since an object appears as desirable in the light of a desire that points toward it. It is believed that the desirable underlies the desired, but Girard inverts this relationship and shows that the desire can appear only in so far as the desire itself can appear desirable. Consequently, the representation of desire is not a straight line running from the desiring subject to the desired object, but a triangle formed from a desiring subject, a desired object and a mediator of that desire that renders the object desirable by desiring it. Thus, every desire is a

desire "according to Another": "We have said that at the origin of a desire there is always the spectacle of another real or illusory desire."[10]

However, mimetic theory's difficulty lies in its own simplicity because the idea that human beings imitate each other is not, for any reader of the history of philosophy, a new finding at all. Girard notes in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* that Aristotle's *Poetics* differentiates human beings from animals by their better ability to imitate: "For it is an instinct of human beings, from childhood, to engage in mimesis (indeed, this distinguishes them from other animals: man is the most mimetic of all)."[11] Girard's revolutionary finding, then, cannot be simply to confirm the mimetic character of human beings. His achievement, framed within a theory of desire, is thinking a true mimetic rationality that rests on a paradox of mimetic rationality, a counterproductive process in which claims for difference and originality stem from imitation and reinforce imitation—this is precisely what we find at the heart of Spinoza's philosophy.

Many readers of Spinoza have noted that the mimetic nature of affects played a significant role in Girard's theory of mimetic desire. Christian Lazzeri, in his analyses of Spinoza and Hobbes, reminds the reader that the imitation of affects in Spinoza and the violent rise of social order resemble what we find in Girard.[12] Lazzeri's reference does bring to mind several of Spinoza's texts, where the mimetic nature of the affects become apparent. Paradigmatically, we find this mimetic affective logic in *Ethics* where the fundamental law of affect is laid out: "From the fact that we imagine a thing like ourselves, toward which we have felt no emotion, to be affected by an emotion, we are thereby affected by a similar emotion."[13] And it is possible to multiply the examples in which Spinoza mentions that an object becomes desirable in so far as other people desire it. The very definition of "Emulation" is completely mimetic and is directly explained by the creation of the desirable by the desired:

> This imitation of emotions, when it is related to pain, is called Pity (see Sch. Pr. 22, III), but when it is related to desire it is called Emulation [*aemulatio*], which is therefore "nothing else but *the desire of some thing which has been engendered in us from the belief that others similar to ourselves have this same desire*."[14]

Finally, every time Spinoza speaks of children,[15] he emphasizes that they are the most sensitive to the mimetic nature of the affects, and that all

their affective life obeys the law of mimetic mechanics:

> For we find that children, their bodies being, as it were continually in a state of equilibrium, laugh or weep merely from seeing others laugh or weep, and whatever else they see others do they immediately want to imitate. In short, they want for themselves whatever they see others take pleasure in.[16]

Spinoza's philosophy is inhabited everywhere by the idea of the imitation of affects and the imitation of desires. However, if we limit ourselves to the *Ethics*, we face two difficulties to overcome.

First, this text does not explain the basis of mimetic desire but only describes it. To explain mimetic desire or Spinoza's philosophy, to establish its etiology, it should be anchored on either a fundamental biological process or a specific essence of human beings, which makes them, as Aristotle said, a more mimetic animal than the rest, for example, as Michel Serres states, thanks to the plasticity of their bodies that allows them to access to a wider variety of gestures, sounds, or postures.[17] Otherwise, it is hard to understand why human beings imitate each other.

Second, the mimetic nature of desire is even less understandable when, in our societies, everything calls us to be different or original. Whoever wants to publish a book must publish an original book. Whoever wants to love must love with a singular love. Whoever wants to be employee of the month must distinguish himself from the others. Everywhere human beings are required to be original, different and singular, not to mention ethics that call us to be authentic, to be what we really are, to abandon appearances to find our true self again.[18] Contemporary societies praise difference, originality and innovation.[19] So, how can we think, on the one hand, that everything calls us to differentiate ourselves, and that there is an essential mimetic nature in human beings? On this point, the cross-referenced reading of Girard and Spinoza is fruitful.

These two problems present themselves to Girard as well as to Spinoza, and here, the Dutch philosopher allows us to pinpoint the French thinker. The strength of Girard, as well as of Spinoza, lies in articulating an intention of difference with a mimetic desire, a difference with a "sameness," articulating them on two different epistemological levels. Beyond *Ethics*, we find in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* a finer and more precise conception of mimetic desire. The *Treatise* tackles the issue of the pursuit of the supreme good. Spinoza asks, what is the good

that one should pursue in life in the same way someone infected by a deadly virus seeks a cure?[20] Traditionally, the highest good is embodied within three objects: sensual pleasures, riches, and honors. As Spinoza puts it, "For the things which for the most part of themselves in life, and which, to judge from their actions, men regard as the highest good, can be reduced to these three headings: riches, honour, and sensual pleasure."[21] In a traditional gesture, Spinoza quickly rejects riches and sensual pleasures since these are fluctuating and temporary, so they only amuse the spirit and do not have the consistency and stability of the supreme good.[22]

Spinoza devotes a specific paragraph to the issue of honors that is condemned for a more original reason: "Finally, honour has this great drawback, that to attain it we must conduct our lives to suit other men, avoiding what the masses avoid and seeking what the masses seek."[23] We understand then the problem presented by the pursuit of honors. In order to attain them, we need to imitate others, pursuing what they pursue and fleeing from what they flee; therefore, to attain honors, one is condemned to imitate others. This need arises from the fact that, in order to be recognized by a particular group, it is necessary to submit to their criteria of recognition. Whoever wants to be honored by a group of warriors must excel in warrior values; whoever, on the other hand, wants to be honored by a group of teachers must excel in teaching. In all cases, the group dictates the criterion of differentiation and distinction.

Hence, the paradox of mimetic rationality. What are honors, and what does the pursuit of honors represent? An honor is a difference. The person seeking honors is seeking to be different than the group of other human beings. For this reason, common language says that a medal or an award are distinctions, things that differentiate a human being for his excellence in a certain field. The pursuit of honors thus manifests the paradoxical logic of a desire for difference, for distinction, which forces human beings to imitate one another. Mimesis, as Spinoza sees it, arises from an original desire for difference.

This intuition of Spinoza complements our understanding of Girard. The Girardian mimetic desire does not mean that men want to imitate each other, nor that they desire to imitate each other, but that they do so in spite of themselves, through an original desire for differentiation. By imitating the mediator, the subject wants to achieve his supposed ontological

autonomy, that is, his apparent difference.[24] When Girard analyzes the "coquette" as she appears in Molière or in Sartre, it is the desire for her difference that comes to light. Everyone desires her because she seems to desire no one. She seems to be different in that she does not imitate the desires of others and manifests herself as self-sufficient.[25] This is the fundamental paradox that nourishes the mimetic desire: we think that the "coquette" is autonomous in her desires and we envy this difference, so we want to be different, just like her. What we desire most from her is her difference. In Girard, at the individual level, everything is about difference, distinction, and the desire for originality; at the collective level, men imitate each other. Spinoza thus allows us to interpret Girard's mimetic desire more precisely by understanding the articulation of a desire for difference as mimetic behavior.

In fact, the first mimetic desire that appears in Girard arises when Don Quixote explains to Sancho his admiration for Amadis of Gaul: "Thus, my friend Sancho, I reckon that whoever imitates him the best will come closest to perfect chivalry."[26] This admiration underlies the conception of mimetic desire that Girard defends and therefore has an architectural character in the work: "Don Quixote has surrendered to Amadis the individual's fundamental prerogative: he no longer chooses the objects of his own desire—Amadis must choose for him. The disciple pursues objects which are determined for him, or at least seem to be determined for him, by the model of all chivalry."[27] The first mimetic desire that allows the unfolding of Girard's entire theory is then Don Quixote's desire for chivalry. But what is a desire for chivalry? It is a desire for difference, since chivalry was a very restricted group of chosen people, a group which not just anyone could access. To be a knight is to be different, and the desire for chivalry is a desire for difference, for distinction in society.

The Girardian mimetic desire must then be interpreted as in Spinoza's work through the articulation of two epistemological levels. Don Quixote wants to differentiate himself and, in order to do so, he is condemned to imitate all the other people who also want to become knights. In a world in which everyone wants to be original and different, one is condemned to imitate others to distinguish oneself. The intentional and individual desire for difference is condemned to submit itself to the differentiating criteria of the group, and, therefore, to desire what everyone else desires. The creation of the desirable by the desired thus substantiates a true mimetic reason that

rests on the rational counterproductivity of difference, shown by Spinoza in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. Since it is always a group that dictates the differentiating criteria, whoever wants to differentiate himself must submit to the group by which he wants to be recognized and differentiated. We find thus in Spinoza the whole theory of mimetic desire where he highlights the articulation of difference with sameness and points out that it is a willingness to distance from one another that projects human beings against each other in a violent way.

The Mimetic and Violent Emergence of the Social Order

Spinoza's conception of mimetic desire expands the similarities with Girard when it comes to the mechanics of the emergence of human groups, and the mechanism according to which they are stabilized by the emergence of a social order. Like Girard, Spinoza opposes two types of explanations of the emergence of social order. On the one hand, according to the Aristotelian conception, social order is the result of a human tendency toward society, of a political purpose housed in individuals themselves.[28] On the other hand, the philosophies of contractualism establish a dialogical and rational etiology of the social order that arises because of a cost-benefit calculation to escape from an original state of misery and violence.[29]

Spinoza's rationalism, as absolute,[30] eradicates any concept of finality,[31] which is why the social order cannot be the result of an anthropological tendency, but neither can it arise from a rational decision. The social pact model assumes that dialogue precedes the establishment of the rules governing coexistence, since norms arise from the agreement. However, this precedence must be reversed, since giving up violence in order to mediate interindividual relationships through language already assumes that a certain ethic has been accepted. The social pact supposes then that the problem to be solved, violence, has already been solved, since for men to accept to dialogue with one another, they must already recognize each other as interlocutors and have previously renounced to kill each other. Faced with this double impossibility, Spinoza presents a third model for thinking about the emergence of social order, a model that takes us back to the heart of Girardian thought.

We find in the *Theological-Political Treatise* a model of the social pact. In chapter 16, Spinoza stipulates that, at the time of unifying their natural rights, men passed a true pact by which they committed themselves to obey rational decisions:

> They therefore arranged that the unrestricted right naturally possessed by each individual should be put into common ownership, and that this right should no longer be determined by the strength and appetite of the individual, but by the power and will of all together. Yet in this they would have failed, had appetite been their only guide (for by the laws of appetite all men are drawn in different directions), and so they had to bind themselves by the most stringent pledges to be guided in all matters only by the dictates of reason (which nobody ventures openly to oppose, lest he should appear to be without capacity to reason) and to keep appetite in check insofar as it tends to another's hurt, to do to no one what they would not want done to themselves, and to uphold another's right as they would their own.[32]

However, the model of the pact later disappears in the *Political Treatise*. The word "contract" occupies a role in the latter text,[33] but as Matheron showed,[34] the use of the word *contratus* refers to the transfer of a right—singular—to a council or a man, so that the contractual transfer is subsequent to the creation of the multitude. Similarly, in paragraph 13 of chapter 2 of the same book, Spinoza explicitly speaks of an agreement: "If two men come together and join forces, they have more power over Nature, and consequently more right, than either one alone."[35] The Latin verb used is *convenire* ("*Si duo simil conveniant et vires jungant*"), which indicates the form of a pact. Nonetheless, once again, Matheron allows us to refute the contractualist interpretation of this text, given that the only time the verb *convenire* appears in reference to the emergence of the state it is accompanied by the adverb "naturally," which prevents us from linking it to the artificial character of a contract:[36] "Since men, as we have said, are led more by passion than by reason, it naturally follows that a people will unite and consent to be guided as if by one mind not at reason's prompting but through some common emotion."[37] The *Political Treatise* thus excludes the rational foundation of a social order since the contractual form only occurs within a preorganized collective.

In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, the contract needed to be founded within a certain type of affect, which distanced Spinoza from the contractualist philosophers. What ultimately blocks violence in the pact, as it appears in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, is not rationality but an affect: "They had to bind themselves by the most stringent pledges to be

guided in all matters only by the dictates of reason (which nobody ventures openly to oppose, lest he should appear to be without capacity to reason)."[38] The key point marking the encounter between Spinoza and Girard is to be found in parentheses. It is because of fear that human beings will be rational as, if they oppose other individuals, they will have to face violence. The basis for the pact is a collective threat. The guarantee of the pact is negative. It is based on fear, which is why the contract is ultimately a form of affect. Thus, even when Spinoza evokes the social pact, it is fear—and therefore an affect—that makes it possible.

To be more precise, the process of creation of the social order comes from the mimetic articulation of four affects, within a fully Girardian logic:

> For this much is quite certain, and proved to be true in our Ethics, that men are necessarily subject to passions, and are so constituted that they pity the unfortunate, envy the fortunate, and are more inclined to vengeance than to compassion. Furthermore, each man wants others to live according to his way of thinking, approving what he approves and rejecting what he rejects. Consequently, since all men are equally desirous of preeminence, they fall to quarrelling and strive their utmost to best one another; and he who emerges victorious is more elated at having hindered someone else than at having gained an advantage for himself.[39]

The four affects mentioned (pity, envy, ambition, and desire for glory) imply a relationship with a certain otherness. Two of them make up the natural sociability of human beings, while the other two are the basis of their unsociability. Pity allows for identification with the other and sympathy, a suffering-with.[40] The desire for glory also brings us closer to others, since in order to be glorified it is necessary to submit to the criteria of what the group glorifies. However, although the two other affects (ambition and envy) present the opposite structure since they drive human beings apart, mimesis allows us to understand the passing from the first two positive affects to the second two negative ones without introducing any qualitative discontinuity.

Just as pity leads us to identify ourselves with the other, the same process of identification produces, if we deploy it fully, envy: "If we think that someone enjoys something that only one person can possess, we shall endeavor to bring it about that he should not possess that thing."[41] Similarly, the desire for glory leads to the ambition for dominance, since everyone wants to impose his standards and values on all, so that their common acceptance will retroactively and mimetically confirm their

validity: “So we see that it is in everyone’s nature to strive to bring it about that others should adopt his attitude to life; and while all strive equally to this end they equally hinder one another, and in all seeking the praise or love of all, they provoke mutual dislike.”[42] The ambition for dominance is the negative of the desire for glory, just as envy is the negative extension of pity; just as in Girard, the model becomes a model of rivalry.

We find then in this articulation of affects two fundamental points of Girardian logic. On the one hand, we see the succession from positive reciprocity to negative reciprocity; as Girard pointed out, a single mechanism makes us pass from positive affects to negative affects without introducing qualitative ruptures between the two.[43] On the other hand, bringing human beings closer together generates violence. The same social affects, by bringing human beings closer through a process of identification, provoke the negative cycle of antisocial and violent affects. In a fully Girardian logic, the cycle of negative reciprocity reigns over human relations since human affects, by self-feeding, take us into a vicious circle from which no one can escape.

Let us see the unfolding of the whole Girardian logic in Spinoza. When we imagine that some being similar to us suffers, we feel pity for him, which is why we try to relieve him: “As far as we can, we endeavor to free from distress the thing that we pity.”[44] But if we succeed in alleviating his suffering, he rejoices, and, therefore, we rejoice that we have been the cause of his happiness, which brings us glory. Since the feeling of being the cause of someone’s joy is pleasant, we want to repeat it and maintain it, which grounds the desire for glory. However, even if we want the happiness of others, we cannot sacrifice our own interests and desires, hence the desire for glory becomes an ambition for dominance, since it will be easier for us to satisfy others (and therefore glorify ourselves) if they agree with our values and our way of life, so we will try to impose them on everyone. If we succeed in convincing others that they should adopt our way of life, and therefore desire what we ourselves desire, they will try to appropriate it, and if they succeed, it will generate envy in us. Finally, if the struggle for the possession of those objects provoking envy is favorable to us, the dispossession of the other will generate sadness, and we fall back into the first moment of the process in which someone who suffers provokes pity in us. Just like in Girard, then, the mimetic character of the affects leads to an

infinite mimetic violence of all against all. From pity to envy, the circle is infernal. After mimetic desire, we find now in Spinoza mimetic violence.

A final process allows us to understand the emergence of social order from this infernal circle of mimetic violence and, once again, the symmetry with Girard's thesis is clearly present. Three things can unite men according to Spinoza: a common hope, a common fear, or a common hatred.[45] Among these affects, the greatest obstacle to violence is fear since in Spinoza's utilitarian logic: "every man refrains from inflicting injury through fear of greater injury."[46] However, the common fear that unites men in the same society has, like in all affects, a quantitative limit, beyond which it is transformed into an opposite affect. When the fear that weighs on citizens reaches a certain limit, it is transformed into indignation, and this, on the contrary, leads to the dissolution of the collective by questioning the social order:

> Thus, in order that a commonwealth should be in control of its own right, it must preserve the causes that foster fear and respect; otherwise it ceases to be a commonwealth. For if the rulers or ruler of the state runs drunk or naked with harlots through the streets, acts on the stage, openly violates or holds in contempt those laws that he himself has enacted, it is no more possible for him to preserve the dignity of sovereignty than for something to be and not be at the same time. Then again, to slaughter subjects, to despoil them, to ravish maidens and the like turns fear into indignation, and consequently the civil order into a condition of war.[47]

There is a quantitative interplay between fear and indignation at the foundation of the social order that allows us to think both its construction and its dissolution. In Spinoza, indignation is the key affect for understanding the emergence of social order. Indignation is a fully mimetic affect.[48] However, the difference between the common fear that unites human beings under the authority of a state and the indignation that is the source of its dissolution is the public character of the latter. Common fear unites and indignation dissolves because in fear each individual finds himself alone and therefore powerless in front of the state or the group, which limits his capacity for rebellion. On the contrary, the public character of indignation informs all citizens that they feel a common affect; therefore, they can unite to fight against the power that appears publicly as a common enemy. Moreover, being public, this affect feeds itself, multiplies, and spreads by the fundamental law of the mimesis of affects.

The mechanism of indignation allows us to explain the emergence of the social order, provided that we substitute the solitude of individuals in regard to the state for the solitude of individuals in the state of nature. As Spinoza pointed out in *Ethics*, the mimesis of the affects is applied, with priority, to individuals whom we perceive as similar to ourselves. If two individuals experience two different affects, the affect we will feel is that of the individual we perceive as closer: "From the fact that we imagine *a thing like ourselves*, toward which we have felt no emotion, to be affected by an emotion, we are thereby affected by a similar emotion."[49] The law of interhuman affect is thus mimetic, but similarity is its catalyst.

It is now possible to explain the emergence of the social order in Spinoza and see how much it resembles Girardian mechanics. Let us imagine human beings in the state of nature. If any one of them suffers, whether from illness, lack of food, or simply from the hardship of living in this state, whether out of pity or desire for glory, the others will help him and struggle to alleviate his sufferings. However, once this suffering is removed, these affects will change into desire for glory, ambition for dominance, and envy. What was a rapprochement between individuals now turns into violence, and the person who had been helped at first will be attacked and treated violently. However, witnessing these attacks, other individuals will feel indignant, and this feeling will spread mimetically among all of them. In each aggression, then, all individuals will be mimetically involved in the struggle. But, since each one feels, with priority, the affect of the one who is most similar to him, he will fight on his side. Thus, everyone will fight against the one who seems less identical to him. This is how common norms emerge, by simple mimesis. Since each one fights alongside the one who is more similar to him, majorities are created which become more and more indignant against the people who are less similar to them. Little by little, by repetition of this mechanism, the struggle of all against all is transformed into a struggle of all against few, and, ultimately, of all against one. Common rules arise then, in a Girardian logic, by the separation between an "us" and a "him." Mimetic indignation allows us to understand how the social order arises immanently, without reference to a contract, transcendent values, or a human essence. It does so, just as in Girard, from a unanimous violence that establishes order through the creation of a "we" stabilized by a common negative affect towards a single individual.

Mimetic desire changed into mimetic violence and now, in turn, into unanimous violence and, therefore, into foundational violence.

Global Democracy as a Solution to the Apocalypse

Everything then in Spinoza seems to be in consonance with Girard's theory. Nevertheless, despite these similarities and the path from mimetic desire to foundational violence, there is an inflexible gap between Girard and Spinoza that lies in the consequences of Revelation. Here, once again, the two thinkers illuminate each other. On the one hand, mimetic theory seems totally closed in on itself, closed on violence since it opens no other possible outcome except that of the apocalypse. On the contrary, Spinoza's philosophy finds a certain salvation in an original and perhaps primal model of democracy.

Mimetic theory presents a frightening paradox that justifies the dark character of Girard's last book, *Battling to the End*.[50] The social order created through the mechanism of the crystallization of collective violence on a single individual implies a price to pay: "Since the dawn of humanity, millions of innocent victims have been killed in this way in order to enable their fellow humans to live together, or at least not to destroy one another."[51] But there seems to be no way out of this mechanism or, worse, the only way out one can imagine presents even more catastrophic consequences. Since mimetic violence is based on a triangle, we can think of a solution to the problem by acting on each of its vertices. First, since the struggle for objects generates violence, why not multiply them? Each rival could have an object identical to the one available to the other without having to take it away. This is the proposal of economics.[52] However, it fails in pacifying society since there are objects of desire that cannot be multiplied (such as the desire for power or for a person). Moreover, mimetic desire does not imply wanting to acquire the same object as the one held by the other but the object itself. It does not imply desiring the same object in the sense of *idem* but of *ipse*. Second, one could work on the "model" vertex of the triangle and distinguish the violence of internal mediations against the peace of external mediations. However, even if this is the solution proposed by Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*,[53] it also fails because, if the individuals who enter into relations of external mediations

are not in conflict with the model, they will enter into conflict with the other individuals who take the same mediator as a model. Finally, one can think of acting on the "subject" vertex of the triangle. It is a matter of renouncing desire in order not to enter the spiral. This solution is seen in the Levinasian turn of *Battling to the End* which is grounded in the phrase "Ignore yourself."[54] However, this solution is too rigorous for us to demand it of all human beings: "We can all participate in the divinity of Christ so long as we renounce our own violence. However, we now know, in part thanks to Clausewitz, that humans will not renounce it."[55] There is no way out of the Girardian mimetic triangle.

This difficulty is even more important since it is not possible to return to the scapegoat and self-transcendence systems of violence, since Christ revealed the innocence of the victims, making the systems' efficacy impossible. For violence to be expelled on a single individual, it is necessary for the crowd to believe in his guilt: "A scapegoat remains effective as long as we believe in its guilt. Having a scapegoat means not knowing that we have one. Learning that we have a scapegoat is to lose it forever and to expose ourselves to mimetic conflicts with no possible resolution."[56] Revelation, then, far from limiting violence, multiplies it by annulling the efficacy of the only mechanism that had blocked and contained it for centuries: "The fetters put in place by the founding murder but unshackled by the Passion, are now liberating planet-wide violence, and we cannot refasten the bindings because we now know that scapegoats are innocent."[57] Revelation is, in Girard, a true *pharmakon* of violence: at once a cure and a poison. When it cancels the possibility of violence against the atoning victim, it opens unbounded possibilities of global violence.[58]

We understand then the lock that closes the mimetic theory. On the one hand, the self-transcendence of the archaic gods is paid at the price of the murder of an innocent; on the other hand, true transcendence closes the violence of the archaic gods but opens the possibility of a violence without limits. Neither self-transcendence nor transcendence hinders mimetic violence.

But perhaps there is a way to do this, no longer by passing from archaic self-transcendence to the true transcendence of Christ but simply by renouncing transcendence of all kinds. Beyond the difficult distinction between transcendences, one can renounce both. The fully immanent

character of Spinoza's philosophy opens the possibility for thinking this solution. Christ occupies a central role in Spinoza's philosophy,[59] to such an extent that many Jewish thinkers reproached him for having subordinated the Old Testament to the New,[60] or for having favored the spread of anti-Semitism by denying the Jewish name itself.[61] In Spinoza's philosophy, Christ is seen as the highest possible achievement of philosophy, a purely rational human being. Moreover, as in Girard, for Spinoza, in an ideal case, if all citizens could reach a high level of knowledge, that is to say, if they let themselves be guided by the simple rules of reason (a process that Spinoza compares to a true conversion),[62] politics itself would be useless since they would live in a totally self-organized anarchy of the wise: "Now if men were so constituted by nature as to desire nothing but what is prescribed by true reason, society would stand in no need of any laws. Nothing would be required but to teach men true moral doctrine, and they would then act to their true advantage of their own accord, whole-heartedly and freely."[63] However, just as Girard does not believe in global conversion, Spinoza knows well that it is impossible for all human beings to attain wisdom. For this reason, the logical conclusion of *Ethics* is that the ignorant will not be saved.[64] However, when Girard draws the conclusion from the impossibility of a global conversion to the apocalypse as the only horizon, Spinoza proposes another solution to solve the same kind of problems: democracy.

This solution is surprising since, for Girard, democracy is the political regime that most favors mimetic violence; hence the futility of the democratic solution: "Only democratic hope can claim to put an end to the tragedy, but we now know that this is a modern platitude."[65] How then to think that, after such closeness to Girard, Spinoza can think a democratic solution and, even more, that he can affirm its absolute character?[66]

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to note first of all that, since Revelation, the status of the victim has changed. Positioning oneself today as a victim is the best way to justify one's own violence, to such an extent that Girardian thinkers speak of "victimary thinking" to explain the self-justification of violence by those who perceive themselves as victims.[67] It is not a matter of confusing the victims with their executioners; from an epistemological point of view, the victims are right, and the executioners are wrong. But Revelation shows, as Pascal saw it, the inefficacy of the truth about violence:

> It is a strange and tedious war when violence attempts to vanquish truth. All the efforts of violence cannot weaken truth, and only serve to give it fresh vigour. All the lights of truth cannot arrest violence, and only serve to exasperate it. When force meets force, the weaker must succumb to the stronger; when argument is opposed to argument, the solid and the convincing triumphs over the empty and the false; but violence and verity can make no impression on each other. Let none suppose, however, that the two are, therefore, equal to each other; for there is this vast difference between them, that violence has only a certain course to run, limited by the appointment of Heaven, which overrules its effects to the glory of the truth which it assails; whereas verity endures forever and eventually triumphs over its enemies, being eternal and almighty as God himself.[68]

From the point of view of violence, good values are not less violent than bad values. Perhaps they are more so since they have the truth in their favor, which allows them to justify violence? For this reason, Spinoza's way out of violence lies in the construction of human collectives that are not based on values, whether good or bad. As Charles Ramond has shown,[69] the law of Spinoza's democracy is the law of numbers and accounts. Every citizen can disagree with the laws voted by the majority and yet must respect them, not because they are good or true laws but because they represent the opinion of the majority:

> We see, then, that the individual citizen is not in control of his own right, but is subject to the right of the commonwealth, whose every command he is bound to carry out, and he does not have any right to decide what is fair or unfair, what is righteous or unrighteous. On the contrary, since the body of the state must be guided as if by a single mind (and consequently the will of the commonwealth must be regarded as the will of all), what the commonwealth decides to be just and good must be held to be so decided by every citizen. Thus, although a subject may consider the decrees of the commonwealth to be unfair, he is nevertheless bound to carry them out.[70]

This policy might seem authoritarian and violent; in reality, it is the mildest. First, because no one can claim that his or her political options are true or good in the face of others that would be bad or false. Therefore, every opinion is as legitimate or illegitimate as the others, and everyone can fight in favor of his own as long as, externally, in his behaviors, he respects the law of the majority. In the same way, the majority cannot claim any value, neither truth nor goodness. Their only legitimacy is mathematical and therefore a slight one, since majorities, being quantitative, can always change. Spinozian democracy is thus a system that is sustained by an

unsustainable lightness of mathematics, without the introduction of any qualitative value.

One could imagine,[71] however, that the majority does no more than mirror the lynch mob as it appears in Girard, and that Spinoza, therefore, in his democracy, does no more than reproduce the archaic model of the struggle of all against one. It would be to misunderstand both Spinoza and Girard and to underestimate the fact that, in his lifetime, Spinoza always rejected mob violence and lynchings. In fact, one of the events that most shocked him and marked his political philosophy was the lynching of the De Witt brothers on August 20, 1672, by the mob in The Hague, a mob that Spinoza denounced as the last of the barbarians, *Ultimi barbarorum.*

Spinoza hinders mimetic violence through democracy because the mob is radically different from the majority. The mob, whether that of the lynchers or that of the victims, always thinks that its violence is justified by certain values. The lynchers really believe that they lynch the culprit in the name of the Good, to punish him for some fault and to restore peace in the community. On the other hand, the majority knows its instability, its lightness, because they know that the majority is never established forever since it is not based on transcendent values that individuals live as eternal and absolute. For this reason, even he who knows to be in reason or in the good must obey the laws of the majority: "Therefore, if a man who is guided by reason has sometimes to do, by order of the commonwealth, what he knows to be contrary to reason, this penalty is far outweighed by the good he derives from the civil order itself; for it is also a law of reason that of two evils the lesser should be chosen."[72] Since both the self-transcendence of the atoning victim and the transcendence of Christ failed to hinder the mimetic deployment of violence, unlike Girard, Spinoza shows that a fully immanent collective presents a viable solution to mimetic violence.

Conclusion

Spinoza's philosophy presents multiple similarities with Girard's mimetic theory. From the mimetic conception of desire and affects to the collective foundational violence, the whole logic of the emergence of the social order in Spinoza can be read in the light of the Girardian model. A single mimetic

mechanic of the affects explains both the rapprochement of human beings, their violent estrangement, and the emergence of social order thanks to the articulation of positive reciprocity with negative reciprocity. We find then in Spinoza the first three moments of the mimetic theory: mimetic desire, mimetic violence, and collective foundational violence.

But the last moment of Spinoza's philosophy makes a turn that the mimetic theory allows us to understand. Both authors also perceived that the mimetic character of violence can take as a vector both the archaic values of the certainty of the guilt of a collective victim, and the values linked to the status of victim shown and valued after the Revelation. In fact, we see today that violence is always done in the name of the Good and, on many occasions, in the name of defending minorities. Thus, although epistemologically different, the truth of transcendence is no less violent than the lie of self-transcendence, which is why we understand that for Girard the apocalypse is the result since truth accelerated the unfolding of violence.

On this path, it has been possible to point out a radical rupture between Spinoza and Girard, a rupture that allows us to think and question both the closed character of the mimetic theory and the democratic model proposed by Spinoza. In this way, the two thinkers illuminate each other. Indeed, since Christ brought to light the mechanism of the scapegoat by displaying his satanic logic on the Cross, mimetic violence no longer knows any kind of limit, not even the one provided by its concentration on a single individual to save all the others. From now on, neither self-transcendence nor transcendence can limit the violent effects of the mimetic mechanism. We know today that both values, falsehood, and truth produce violence.

There remains then a last option to get out of the spiral of mimetic violence, and it is Spinoza's solution that must be explained in the light of Girard's mimetic theory. Since both falsehood and truth produce violence, the only way out of the circle of violence is not to pass from falsehood to truth but simply to renounce the will to base human collectives on values. Spinoza then draws a different conclusion from the warlike character of transcendence by eliminating any possibility of thinking a legitimacy above legality.[73] It is possible to limit mimetic violence without differentiating between types of transcendence, by cancelling all transcendence from which mimetic violence feeds and imposing a pure immanence of the foundation of human collectives through the construction of a totally

quantitative democracy. This is possible on the sole condition of differentiating the functioning of the majority with that of the mob and seeing that, in Spinoza, these groups are opposed on the point of transcendence. While the mob violates its victims because of the certainty that its actions are based on values, the majority knows its fragility and its dissociation from any kind of transcendence. Spinozian democracy, then, hinders mimetic violence by modifying the structural framework within which mimetic desires act.[74] For this reason, mimetic theory, beyond its own interest, is also a hermeneutic instrument to illuminate Spinoza's philosophy, which opens such an important space to desire, the imitation of the affects, Revelation, and to understanding why his mimetic anthropology leads to a democracy without values that presents itself as a true twilight of idols.

NOTES

1. "What would be the value of a philosopher of whom one could say, 'He has created no concepts; he has not created his own concepts?,'" Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, What *Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 6.

2. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1965), 14. For inexplicable reasons, the English translation of the text omits the word "Seuls," thus reproducing the gesture of concealment of the rivalry and violence that exists between literature and the social and human sciences: "Seuls les romanciers révèlent la nature imitative du désir." See René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et verité romanesque*, in *De la violence à la divinité*, ed. René Girard (Paris: Grasset, 2007), 45.

3. "If their work is to outlast fleeting fashionability, dramatists as well as novelists must discover this fundamental source of human conflict,—namely mimetic rivalry—and they must discover it alone, with no help from philosophers, moralists, historians, or psychologists, who always remain silent on the subject." René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing Publishing, 2000), 3.

4. Stéphane Vinolo, *René Girard: Du mimétisme à l'hominisation; "La violence différante"* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 59–76, 188–206. Stéphane Vinolo, "Critique de la raison mimétique: Girard lecteur de Sartre," in *René Girard: La théorie mimétique; De l'apprentissage à l'apocalypse*, ed. Charles Ramond (Paris: PUF, 2010), 59–104.

5. "For if the philosopher is the friend or lover of wisdom, is it not because he lays claim to wisdom, striving for it potentially rather than actually possessing it? Is the friend also the claimant then, and is that of which he claims to be the friend the Thing to which he lays claim but not the third party who, on the contrary, becomes a rival? Friendship would then involve competitive distrust of the rival as much as amorous striving toward the object of desire. The basic point about friendship is that the two friends are like claimant and rival (but who could tell them apart?)." Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy*?, 4.

6. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, part III, "Definitions of the Emotions," 1, in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 311.

7. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 27, 292.

8. “The authority of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates carries little weight with me. I should have been surprised if you had produced Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius or one of the Atomists or defenders of the atoms. It is not surprising that those who have thought up occult qualities, intentional species, substantial forms and a thousand more bits of nonsense should have devised spectres and ghosts, and given credence to old wives’ tales with a view to disparaging the authority of Democritus, whose high reputation they so envied that they burned all books which he had published amidst so much acclaim.” Spinoza, “Letter 56,” to Hugo Boxel, in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 905–6.

9. “La cathédrale girardienne est une pyramide qui repose sur sa pointe: *l’hypothèse mimétique*.” Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Ordres et désordres, enquête sur un nouveau paradigme*, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1990), 125.

10. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 105.

11. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987). Aristotle, *Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 37.

12. Christian Lazzeri, *Droit, pouvoir et liberté: Spinoza critique de Hobbes* (Paris: PUF, 1998), 274, note 3.

13. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 27, 292.

14. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 27, Scholium, 292.

15. For an analysis of childhood in Spinoza, see François Zourabichvili, *Le conservatisme paradoxal de Spinoza: Enfance et royauté* (Paris: PUF, 2002).

16. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 32, Scholium, 295.

17. Michel Serres, *Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

18. This contemporary pathology of “being oneself” has been eloquently denounced in a magnificent book. See Renaud Camus, *Éloge moral du paraître* (Sables: Paris 1995).

19. René Girard, “Innovation et répétition,” in *La voix méconnue du réel*, ed. René Girard (Paris: Grasset, 2002), 291–314.

20. “I saw that my situation was one of great peril and that I was obliged to seek a remedy with all my might, however uncertain it might be, like a sick man suffering from a fatal malady who, foreseeing certain death unless a remedy is forthcoming, is forced to seek it, however uncertain it be, with all his might, for therein lies all his hope.” Baruch Spinoza, *Treatise on the emendation of the intellect*, in *Complete works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), 4

21. Baruch Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §3, in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 4.

22. “With regard to sensual pleasure, the mind is so utterly obsessed by it that it seems as if it were absorbed in some good, and so is quite prevented from thinking of anything else. But after the enjoyment of this pleasure there ensues a profound depression which, if it does not completely inhibit the mind, leads to its confusion and enervation.” Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, §3–4, 4.

23. Ibid., §5, 4.

24. “The object is only a means of reaching the mediator. The desire is aimed at the mediator’s *being*.” Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 53.

25. “The coquette’s indifference toward her lover’s sufferings is not feigned but it has nothing to do with ordinary indifference. It is not an absence of desire; it is the other side of a desire of oneself.

The lover is fascinated by it. He even believes he sees in his mistress' indifference that divine autonomy of which he feels he has been deprived and which he burns to acquire." Ibid., 105–106.

26. Ibid., 1.

27. Ibid., 1–2.

28. "And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech." Aristotle, *Politics*, book 1, 1253a (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 11.

29. "Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man." Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 13 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88.

30. "Absolute rationalism is what distinguishes Spinoza from the other three greats of classical rationalism." Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza, I—Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1997), 9.

31. "All the prejudices which I intend to mention here turn on this one point, the widespread belief among men that all things in Nature are like themselves in acting with an end in view. Indeed, they hold it as certain that God himself directs everything to a fixed end." Spinoza, *Ethics*, I, Appendix, 39.

32. Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, XVI, in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 528.

33. "The contract or laws whereby a people transfer its right to one council or one man should undoubtedly be broken when this is in the interests of the general welfare." Baruch Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, IV, 6, in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 698.

34. Alexandre Matheron, "The Problem of Spinoza's Evolution: From the *Theological-Political Treatise* to the *Political Treatise*," in *Politics, Ontology and Knowledge in Spinoza*, ed. Filippo Del Lucchese, David Maruzzella, and Gil Morejón (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 164.

35. Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, II, 13, 686.

36. Alexandre Matheron, "Indignation and the *Conatus* of the Spinozist State," in *Politics, Ontology and Knowledge in Spinoza*, ed. Filippo Del Lucchese, David Maruzzella, and Gil Morejón (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 125.

37. Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, VI, 1, 700.

38. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, XVI, 528.

39. Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, I, 5, 681.

40. "Pity [*commiseratio*], which we may define as 'pain arising from another's hurt.'" Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 22, Scholium, 290.

41. Ibid., III, 32, 295.

42. Ibid., III, 31, Scholium, 295.

43. René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 3–20.

44. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 27, Corollary 3, 292.

45. "Since men, as we have said, are led more by passion than by reason, it naturally follows that a people will unite and consent to be guided as if by one mind not at reason's prompting but through

some common emotion, such as (as we said in Section 9, Chapter 3) a common hope, or common fear, or desire to avenge some common injury." Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, VI, 1, 700.

46. Spinoza, *Ethics*, IV, 37, Scholium 2, 341.

47. Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, IV, 4, 697.

48. "Hatred toward one who has injured another we shall call Indignation [*indignatio*]." Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 22, Scholium, 290.

49. Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 27, 292.

50. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010).

51. Girard, *Battling to the End*, ix.

52. Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumouchel, *L'enfer des choses: René Girard et la logique de l'économie* (Paris: Seuil, 1979).

53. "We shall speak of *external mediation* when the distance is sufficient to eliminate any contact between the two spheres of *possibilities* of which the mediator and the subject occupy the respective centres. We shall speak of *internal mediation* when this same distance is sufficiently reduced to allow these two spheres to penetrate each other more or less profoundly." Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 9.

54. Emmanuel Levinas, "Ignore-toi—toi-même," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, *Carnets de captivité et autres inédits* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), 279.

55. Girard, *Battling to the End*, xvi.

56. Ibid., xiv.

57. Ibid., xi.

58. "We now know that suspending violence, failing to renounce it straight away, always makes it grow. Violence can never reduce violence." Girard, *Battling to the End*, 45–46. Unfortunately, the verb translated by "suspending" is the French "différer," which is more precise as it implies the idea of displacement in time and space, a delay.

59. Alexandre Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* (Paris: Aubier, 1971).

60. "We entirely agree with the opinion of our late lamented and admirable friend Jacob Gordin: Spinoza was guilty of betrayal. Within the history of ideas, he subordinated the truth of Judaism to the revelation of the New Testament. The latter is of course surpassed by the intellectual love of God, but Western being involves this Christian experience, even if it is only a stage." Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 108.

61. "C'est la plus générale des thèses indécentes de Spinoza, celles dont toutes les autres dérivent: *Les Juifs sont responsables et coupables de la haine qu'ils suscitent*." Jean-Claude Milner, *Le sage trompeur* (Paris: Verdier, 2013), 90.

62. Pierre Macherey, *Introduction à l'Ethique de Spinoza, La cinquième partie, les voies de la libération* (Paris: PUF, 1994).

63. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, V, 438.

64. Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza*.

65. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 47.

66. "I pass on at length to the third kind of state, the completely absolute state *omnio absolutum imperium which* we call democracy." Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, XI, 1, 752.

67. Eric Gans, "Victimocracy," *The Chronicles of Love & Resentment*, no. 442 (2000).

68. Blaise Pascal, *Provincial Letters, Letter XII* (London: Penguin, 1988), 191–92. This quotation from Pascal is the exergue of the French version of *Battling to the End.* For mysterious reasons, it has not been reproduced in the English translation of the text.

69. Charles Ramond, "La loi du Nombre (ou la démocratie comme 'régime absolu')," in Baruch Spinoza, *Œuvres V: Traité Politique*, ed. Charles Ramond (Paris: PUF, 2005).

70. Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, III, 5, 691.

71. Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 334–71.

72. Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, III, 6, 691–92.

73. Frédéric Lordon, *La société des affects, pour un structuralisme des passions* (Paris: Seuil, 2015), 131–81.

74. "The best state is one where men live together in harmony and where the laws are preserved unbroken. For it is certain that rebellions, wars, and contempt for a violation of the laws are to be attributed not so much to the wickedness of subjects as to the faulty organisation of the state." Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, V, 2, 721.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jeremiah Alberg

As most readers will know well, René Girard's first and perhaps greatest discovery was mimetic desire. Even his critics acknowledge that in his first book, through a series of brilliant analyses of some Europe's greatest novels, Girard uncovered the human phenomenon, so often hidden from view, that we desire not because of the intrinsic desirability of the object, nor due to some authentic subjective passion, but rather because of someone else's desire. My "model" indicates to me that the object is desirable simply by desiring it himself. I begin to want it also, but generally without the conscious awareness, without even the suspicion, that my desire is coming from the other.

Girard never claimed absolute originality in describing mimetic desire. After all, he was making explicit what he had found in novels stretching from *Don Quixote* to *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*). Nevertheless, it can still surprise one how much of his thinking about mimetic phenomena is anticipated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), not only in his novels but especially his theoretical writings. This has led one of our great literary critics, Tzvetan Todorov, to write: "the 'mimetic desire' of Girard is only another name for *amour-propre* of Rousseau."[1] *Amour-propre* along with its pendant concept *amour-de-soi*—or love of oneself—are central concepts in Rousseau's diagnostic of modern culture. Indeed, the former plays a role in Rousseau's philosophy, not unlike the role mimetic desire plays in Girard's thought. That is, it is the mechanism by which Rousseau explains the devolution of humanity.[2]

The term itself is first defined and employed in Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, that is, his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men* (1755), but was implied already in his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* or the *First Discourse* (1750). These two writings along with his first novel, *Julie: Or the New Heloise*, form the core of Rousseau's diagnostic or critical writings and pave the way for his more positive proposals. Summing up Rousseau's project, Immanuel Kant explains the function of these three works in this way:

> Rousseau wrote three works on the damage done to our species by 1) leaving nature for culture, which weakened our strength, 2) civilization, which caused inequality and mutual oppression, 3) presumed moralization, which brought about unnatural education and the deformation of our way of thinking. These three works, I maintain, which present the state of nature as a state of innocence (a paradise guarded against our return by the gatekeeper with a fiery sword), should serve his *Social Contract, Émile*, and *Savoyard Vicar* only as a guiding thread for finding our way out of the labyrinth of evil with which our species has surrounded itself by its own fault.[3]

We will follow Kant's suggestion and look at how Rousseau sees the damage of *amour-propre* working itself out in departure from nature and the rise of civilization. In this we will find a critique of modernity that anticipates and converges with Girard's. We will then turn to how Rousseau prescribes "finding our way out of the labyrinth of evil" and note some of the profound differences with Girard.

Rousseau presents a very different picture of the state of nature from his predecessors, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Hobbes is well known for his description of this state as being a state of war: "During the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man."[4] Hobbes saw clearly, and Rousseau agrees that love-of-self, *amour-de-soi*, or the drive for self-preservation is basic to all living things, including human beings. This fundamental principle can and does push people to violence in order to protect themselves. Rousseau, however, claims that there is

> another Principle which Hobbes did not notice, and which—having been given to man in order to soften, under certain circumstances the ferocity of his *amour-propre* or the desire for his self-preservation before the birth of this love—tempers the ardor for his own well-being by an innate repugnance to see his fellow man suffer. . . . I speak of Pity.[5]

But it is not to pity that we turn our attention. Rather it is to that which pity is to soften—"the ferocity of his *amour-propre*." Rousseau inserts a footnote here, and, as is so often the case with Rousseau, this footnote turns out to be at least as significant as the main text.

In the note Rousseau begins by distinguishing *amour-propre* and "love of oneself" as "two passions very different in their Nature and their effects." Love of self, as I wrote above, is the love that leads each living being to be concerned about its preservation, "and which, directed in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue." On the other hand, "*amour-propre* is only a relative sentiment, artificial and born in Society, which inclines each individual to have a greater esteem for himself than for anyone else, inspires in men all the harm they do to one another, and is the true source of honor."[6]

Rousseau contends, against those who hold the state of nature to be a state of war, that *amour-propre* does not exist in the "genuine state of Nature."[7] It cannot exist, because

> each particular man regarding himself as the sole Spectator to observe him, as the sole being in the universe to take an interest in him, and as the sole judge of his own merit, it is not possible that a sentiment having its source in comparisons he is not capable of making could spring up in his soul.[8]

There are no models and so no obstacles in Rousseau's state of nature. No comparisons are possible, given the human's primitive state of development. While this may seem unfortunate, Rousseau points out that it also means there is "no hate or desire for revenge" because these are "passions that can arise only from the opinion that some offense has been received."[9] If one removes evaluating reason and the capacity for making comparisons, then one may indeed have violence, but it is the violence of the animal world—a violence without offense. In the main text, he writes of it in this way:

> Since they [primitive humans] had no kind of commerce among themselves; since they consequently knew neither vanity, nor consideration, nor esteem, nor contempt; since they did have the slightest notion of thine and mine, nor any genuine idea of justice; since they regarded the violences they might suffer as harm easy to redress and not as an insult which must be punished, and since they did not even dream of vengeance, except perhaps mechanically and on the spot, like a dog that bites the stone thrown at him, their disputes

> would rarely have had bloody consequences had there been no more sensitive subject than Food.[10]

With the last phrase Rousseau admits that there is a more sensitive subject than food, one that often leads to violence in the animal world, and that is sexuality. But Rousseau resolves this in a similar manner. He limits it "to that which is Physical in love."[11] In the state of nature, humans do not have preferences or imaginary needs. They conjoin their bodies and move on. All of these things have the character of natural events, that is, things that may be beneficial and pleasurable or harmful and painful, but they do not stir up desires for that which one cannot have; they are not mimetic desire or *amour-propre*.

The consequences of the distinction between love of oneself and *amour-propre* are enormous. It enables Rousseau to claim that our sufferings and evil are self-inflicted. Humans complain of the evils of their lot, but Rousseau points out the evils complained about stem from "the constitution of the Civil man."[12] If one were to judge from the standard of the "Natural man," then one would have nothing about which to complain because one "would have perceived that man has hardly any evils other than those he has given himself, and that Nature would have been justified."[13] It is precisely this that led Kant to write his famous encomium to Rousseau, making him equal in his sphere to Newton in the physical cosmos.

> Newton saw for the very first time order and regularity combined with great simplicity, where before him disorder and [a] poorly matched manifold as found; and since then comets run in geometrical courses.
>
> Rousseau discovered for the very first time beneath the manifold of forms adopted by the human being the deeply hidden nature of the same and the hidden law according to which providence is justified by his observations. Before that the objections of Alfonso and Manes still held. After Newton and Rousseau, God is justified, and henceforth Pope's theorem is true.[14]

We must not limit the convergence of Rousseau's thought with Girard to the identity of *amour-propre* and mimetic desire. Rousseau's phenomenology of the historical development of *amour-propre* anticipates Girard's thought on mimetic rivalry. Pankaj Mishra points how much more "prescient" Rousseau proved to be over the other philosophes "in condemning commercial society based on mimetic desire, as a game rigged

by and in favour of elites; a recipe, in other words, for class conflict, moral decay, social chaos and political despotism."[15]

There are many passages that one could quote at length in which Rousseau condemns the damage he sees society doing. I will limit myself to this one taken from a footnote in the *Second Discourse*, because it seems to me to capture in a nutshell the whole movement from mimetic rivalry to violence to despotism:

> Let us therefore penetrate, through our frivolous demonstrations of good will, what goes on at the bottom of our Hearts, and let us reflect on what the state of things must be where all men are forced to flatter and destroy one another, and where they are born enemies by duty and swindlers by interest. . . .
>
> Savage man, when he has eaten, is at peace with all Nature, and the friend of all his fellows. If it is sometimes a question of disputing his meal, he never comes to blows without first having compared the difficulty of winning with that of finding his subsistence elsewhere; and as pride is not involved in the fight, it is ended by a few blows; the victor eats, the vanquished goes off to seek his fortune, and all is pacified. But for a man in Society these are altogether different affairs: it is first of all a question of providing for the necessary, and then for the superfluous; next come delights, then immense wealth, and then subjects, and then Slaves; he does not have a moment of respite. What is most singular is that the less natural and urgent the needs, the more the passions augment, and, what is worse, the power to satisfy them; so that after long prosperity, after having swallowed up many treasures and desolated many men, my Hero will end by ruining everything until he is the sole master of the Universe. Such in brief is the moral picture, if not of human life, at least of the secret pretensions of the Heart of every Civilized man.[16]

We see here the movement from mimetic desire to mimetic rivalry to violence. From a Girardian perspective, the next question would be: what about the role of religion? For Girard religion is the originary matrix within which society surrounds itself in order to both use violence and protect itself from it. While the centrality of the concept of *amour-propre* leaves no doubt that Rousseau saw human relations in society as mimetic, one can still question whether or not he saw them as religious. This is a more difficult question, and interestingly, one that is rarely raised by Rousseau scholars. Rousseau was deeply interested in the origins of things. He wrote not only the *Discourse of the Origin of Inequality* but also an *Essay on the Origin of Language*. The lack of any mention of the origin of religion in the *Second Discourse* seems to me to be significant.[17] To put the question in Derrida's idiom: "Why this particular form of reserve?"

In fact, I think that one can argue that religion does emerge in the *Second Discourse* and that its emergence marks the point of deepest convergence

between Rousseau and Girard. For Rousseau hints that at the very basis of "society," at the very birth of order, is both sacrifice and divinity.

As we saw above, Rousseau draws a stark contrast between his vision of the state of nature and that of Hobbes. But he does make clear that this peaceful state is limited to the "genuine state of Nature." There are differences even within the state of nature and devolvement from the point where each person can through his or her own power provide for their individual needs to the point at which they become dependent upon one another. Once this has happened, a certain dynamic takes hold, so that no matter what the benefits, society "necessarily brings men to hate each other in proportion to the conflict of their interests, to render each other apparent services and in fact to do every imaginable harm to one another."[18] In the miserable situation of "the most frightful disorder" and "perpetual conflict" that then "gave way to the most horrible state of war," Rousseau claims that it is here that "the most deliberate project that ever entered the human mind" was hit upon.[19] Humans would use violence to control violence. The reasons used to convince people to follow this project were "specious" but effective: "Let us unite . . . to protect the weak from oppression, restrain the ambitious, and secure for everyone the possession of what belongs to him."[20] More importantly, it was put forward that "instead of turning our forces against ourselves, let us gather them into one supreme power which governs us according to wise Laws, protects and defends all the members of the association, repulses common enemies, and maintains us in an eternal accord."[21] Rousseau is discussing the beginnings of the political order, but the language that he uses is religious. "One supreme power" is another term for a god. "Eternal accord" is again a transcendent idea. According to Girard, the sacred is the gathering of human violence into a supreme, transcendent power that governs, protects, and defends the community in a transcendent or eternal manner.

Rousseau, for his part, sees the outcome of this plan to form a supreme power for eternal accord as being that "all ran to meet their chains believing they ensured their freedom."[22] I construe this as the equivalent of the *méconnaissance* that Girard sees as necessary for establishment of culture on the basis of the victim. Rousseau continues: "even the wise saw the necessity of resolving to sacrifice one part of their freedom for the preservation of the other, just a wounded man has his arm cut off to save the

rest of his Body."[23] I am not arguing that Rousseau means anything more here than what he says. One gives up part of one's freedom to protect the rest of it. But it is of interest that Rousseau resorts to the religious vocabulary of sacrifice at this moment. In his political thought, Rousseau is clear that no government can save itself by sacrificing one of its members. As soon as it does that, it has lost all its legitimacy. But at this point in the *Second Discourse*, that is, in his prognosis of what is wrong with social humans, Rousseau reaches for religious vocabulary that suggests that the founding of society requires some sort of sacred and some sort of sacrifice in order to end the rampant violence.

We turn now to how Rousseau proposes to bring human beings out of the "labyrinth of evil." Rousseau's most systematic account of preventing and thereby repairing the evil done by *amour-propre* is found in *Émile* (1762), his bildungsroman. It is worth emphasizing just that fact: the prescription is a new form of education. For those who are already depraved, it is too late; nothing can be done. There is, for Rousseau, no going back. One must begin with anew, with an unspoiled child who is, primarily, to be protected from any bad influence. In the prescription as much as in the diagnosis, Rousseau is extremely sensitive to the mimetic issues.

Rousseau knows that children like to imitate, and he uses this predilection for his own educational ends. He advises other educators to be virtuous and good. "Let your example be graven in your pupils' memories until they can enter their hearts." At the same time, he admits that "these virtues by imitation are the virtues of apes." He baldly states: "man is an imitator." But he also warns that, while the taste for imitation belongs indeed to a well-ordered nature, "in society it degenerates into vice." In fact, Rousseau claims that "the foundation of imitation among us comes from the desire always to be transported out of ourselves. If I succeed in my enterprise, Émile will sure not have this desire."[24] Hence Émile will not imitate.

Émile is not exempt from *amour-propre* and once it gets active, "the relative *I* is constantly in play, and the young man never observes others without returning to himself and comparing himself with them."[25] This can lead to being discouraged about being only himself. Rousseau states that "as for my Émile, if in these parallels he just once prefers to be something

other himself—were this other Socrates, were it Cato—everything has failed."[26]

It needs to be pointed out that there is growing appreciation in the scholarship that *amour-propre* is not intrinsically evil.[27] One sees a parallel trend in the understanding of mimetic desire. Both *amour-propre* and mimetic desire are neutral and become good or evil depending on how they develop. Rousseau uses *amour-propre* to bring Émile into the moral world. He says that it "is a useful but dangerous instrument. Often it wounds the hand making use of it and rarely does good without evil."[28] The danger here is that, in being more content and happier than others, Émile will think himself worthier to be so. "This is the error most to be feared, because it is the most difficult to destroy."[29]

To put it in slightly different language, the most precarious moment in the formation of a child's identity is that one where he falls prey to vanity—to thinking more highly of himself based solely on comparisons with others. As we saw above, this is *amour-propre* used for a bad end or mimetic desire leading to making myself a god whom others should worship.

So how is one to avoid this? Rousseau is clear that ultimately the tutor only has two tools at his disposal throughout most of the educational enterprise. Toward the end of it, he reminds the tutor: "Up to now you got nothing from him except by force or ruse. Authority and the law of duty were unknown to him. He had to be constrained or deceived to make him obey you."[30] Throughout the book, Rousseau gives several detailed examples of how to construct the ruse so as to force the child to do what is sought without ever appearing to be directly manipulating him. In the case of combatting vanity, Rousseau gives a long and detailed explanation of how it is to be done in the episode with the sleight-of-hand artist.[31] Due to space limitations, I cannot give this example the treatment it deserves, but we can summarize it in the following way. First of all, the tutor's goal at this particular stage is to teach Émile how to orient himself using a map and compass. In particular, he is searching for a way to impart to Émile how to construct his own compass. The symbolic meanings could not be clearer. In the process of letting him discover this, the boy learns a little about magnetism and so figures out how a trick performed at the country fair by a "sleight-of-hand artist" could be imitated. Émile is proud of his knowledge, eager to show it off, and the tutor lets him. In so doing, he embarrasses the

sleight-of-hand artist by ruining his trick. The artist, however, is gracious and invites them back the next evening, promising an even bigger audience. Émile is beside himself with excitement. They go to the fair, and he is ready to perform again. But this time it does not work, and he is publicly shamed. The sleight-of-hand artist performs wonderfully, while Émile goes home humiliated. The tutor has, of course, carefully arranged all that has happened so that Émile will suffer the greatest humiliation possible and never suspect that the tutor had anything to do with it. This experience is fundamental to Rousseau's educational method, and later in the book, when the same problem threatens to emerge again, Rousseau states: "The adventure with the Trickster would be repeated in countless ways."[32]

It is hard to imagine Girard endorsing such methods for the overcoming of mimetic rivalry. It would be too easy for the rival to shift from being the sleight-of-hand artist to being the tutor. The difference between their approaches is not far to seek. At the end of the episode mentioned above, the sleight-of-hand-artist visits the tutor and Émile in their lodgings. In the course of his talk with them, he admonishes the tutor, saying: "The boy I understand, he sinned out of ignorance." For a reader familiar with Rousseau the use of the word "sinned" here is striking. He almost never speaks of sin. He mentions it here to reinforce the point that there is no forgiveness. In traditional moral theology, a sin committed out of ignorance, as long as the ignorance is not culpable, is not a sin and there is no need for forgiveness. For Girard, once we have understood mimetic desire and mimetic rivalry and seen how it leads to the scapegoat mechanism, there has to be a reconciliation with the victim that involves forgiveness. Thus, when we ask why is it that there seems to be a quasi-necessity of *amour-propre* or of mimetic desire going wrong the answers given by the two are quite different.

Rousseau repeatedly affirms that the key to his system is the natural goodness of human beings, and we can understand that, quite rightly, to imply a rejection of original sin, so that Rousseau's system is deeply religious in the sense that it rejects the doctrine of original sin and affirms the goodness of creation. As the opening sentence of Émile expresses it: "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the author of things, everything degenerates in the hand of men."[33] Along these lines, Cassirer writes: "For was it not precisely Rousseau who again and again proclaimed the doctrine of original goodness of human nature, and who made this very

doctrine the center and pivot of all his thought? How can evil and guilt be attributed to human nature if it is free from both in its original state, if it knows no radical depravity? This is the question around which Rousseau's thought circled ever anew."[34]

Rousseau grounds his critique of culture on his principle of the natural goodness of human beings. By beginning with a state of peaceful stasis, Rousseau can map out the growing violence with our "fall" into society and the way it eventually produces the social order. Girard, on the other hand, always accepted, in one form or another, something akin to the doctrine of original sin. He consistently criticized the "Rousseauian doctrine" of "the 'natural goodness' of man."[35] He said in an interview: "People think I'm some kind of wild monster because I don't have any Rousseauist illusions about the natural goodness of man, but nothing teaches moderation like the theory of original sin, which is always the opposite of what its critics say it is. Because it always meets with disappointment in reality, the belief in man's natural goodness always leads to the hunt for scapegoats. Indeed, on this point, the story of Rousseau himself and his descent into paranoia are quite exemplary."[36]

Rousseau sees evil as a movement away from natural goodness, and Girard sees it as a form of original sin. And yet one could also say that both see the evil as stemming from being born into a community in which human relations are always already distorted and distorting. In this sense, I have been arguing that it is precisely Rousseau's rejection on the one side and Girard's acceptance on the other that allows us to traverse the distance that separates them and to approach the former, not as an "enemy whose secrets must be conquered by ruse and violence," but as someone from whom we can learn.[37] Rousseau helps us to understand different facets of mimetic rivalry. Few writers have been as keen in revealing the psychology of desire. But Girard can help us to read Rousseau.

We need this help because our difficulty does not stem from some lack of grasping Rousseau's principle of natural goodness. By and large, the idea of original sin has been rejected by most people, even among Christians. Our difficulty lies much more understanding how to read Rousseau's system. We can make sense of parts of his works but not the whole. More than eighty-five years ago, Cassirer has pointed out the lack of consensus in Rousseau scholarship on the most fundamental issues.

> After the most thorough research into biographical detail, after the countless investigations into the historical background and sources of Rousseau's doctrine, after the penetrating analysis of his writing that has extended to every detail, we should expect that clarity would have been achieved at least in regard to the basic characteristics of his nature or that a consensus would prevail concerning the basic intention of his work, but even a glance at the Rousseau literature disappoints this expectation.[38]

Rousseau explicitly tells us that his system is the working out of the principle of the natural goodness of the human being. Given that we know this, why has our understanding of the systematic nature of Rousseau's thought constantly run aground in the various aporias scholars continue to find in his work?

I believe this is due to the fact that this principle of natural goodness is not simply assumed by Rousseau but is rather proved by him, and this proof is contained in the *Second Discourse*. He is quite explicit about how one gets to the state of nature, which grounds his position on natural goodness, and his methodology has to be taken into account, otherwise the principle alone can lead to widely diverging and seemingly disparate results.

One arrives at the state of nature through a series of negative moves—one must strip away everything social from the human person. But that is difficult and perhaps even impossible. As the comparison with the statue of Glaucus in the introduction to the *Discourse on Inequality* makes clear, we possess no innate standard that would separate the pristine original from the accretions. We are unsure how deeply to make the cut. Accordingly, Rousseau introduces a crucial methodological move: "Let us therefore begin by setting all the facts aside, for they do not affect the question."[39] As the context makes clear and most commentators insist, the "facts" that Rousseau is setting aside are the facts of Genesis, including its account of the disobedience of our first parents. Rousseau begins, but his beginning is a conclusion as the word "therefore" indicates. The argument is that one only gets to the state of nature through a rejection of the Scriptures. This is not an ancillary move, nor simply a strategy to avoid conflict with authorities, rather it is a constitutive methodological step in Rousseau's system.

I think this point bears emphasizing. One can ask the question why Rousseau's thought and system have influenced so many of his very talented contemporaries, not only d'Alembert, Diderot, and even (I know there are disagreements here) Voltaire but also Christoph de Beaumont and

others on the Church's side. I believe that the reason is that Rousseau is not simply an atheist, like most of the philosophes, nor, obviously is he simply a believer. Rather, he is entwined with Christ and Christianity in a relationship of *scandal*. Unlike more normal relationships, in a relationship marked by scandal, the attraction and the repulsion are functions of each other: the more one is attracted, the more one is repelled, and the more one is repelled, the more one is attracted. Rousseau expresses the scandalous space in which his system is inscribed by stating that one must take up the Scriptures precisely to set them aside. This is the source of unity of his system. Eric Gans puts it this way:

> Although many would rather have it otherwise, it seems no exaggeration to affirm that since the time that Jesus (or his disciples) applied to his individual self the "suffering servant" role of deutero-Isaiah, the most successful mechanism for self-maintenance in the center of the human universe has been that devised by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Such mechanisms are rare, and although their significance comes from the fact that they can be used by virtually anyone, a particular prestige attaches to their inventors who acquire, for good or ill, the status of mimetic models.
>
> The comparison of Rousseau with Christ is not facetious.[40]

What Gans makes clear is that Rousseau is in rivalry with Christ, that he has invented a "variant of the Christic mechanism," and so he becomes a mimetic model for the rest of us but as an "always already" scandalized model. Thus, if we reject Rousseau because we are scandalized by his attempt to supplant Christ, then obviously we are scandalized. But if we imitate him, that is, follow him, we are no less scandalized. Rousseau is setting us to stumble.

If you look in the index of most books written on Rousseau, you will not find any reference to "scandal" listed. And yet it appears explicitly in a number of places, such as through the Controversy and in the *Dialogues*, that is, at both the beginning and end of Rousseau's career. If one understands scandal, thanks to Girard, as the node of intersection between the impossible and necessary, then one finds the whole of the *Discourse on Inequality* as structured around the impossible necessity or the scandal of self-knowledge. Throughout the five years of the Controversy, the accusation of causing scandal, of leading the unsuspecting into sin, was hurled at Rousseau. We know that Rousseau took these attacks seriously. About them he writes:

> Before explaining myself, I meditated on my subject at length and deeply, and I tried to consider all aspects of it. I doubt that any of my adversaries can say as much. At least I don't perceive in their writings any of those luminous truths that are no less striking in their obviousness than in their novelty, and that are always the fruit and proof of an adequate meditation. I dare say that they have never raised a reasonable objection that I did not anticipate and to which I did not reply in advance. That is why I am always compelled to restate the same things.[41]

And yet there was one objection, the objection of causing scandal, that he could not answer.

In his "Reply" to the *First Discourse*, the King of Poland, Stanislaus I, asks: "Would he [Rousseau] wish, then for vice to appear openly, for indecency to be joined to disorder and scandal to crime?"[42] Rousseau replied in an essay, titled, "Observations by Jean-Jacques Rousseau of Geneva On the Reply Made to his Discourse." Allow me to quote at length.

> He asks me if I would like to have vice show itself openly. Assuredly I would like it. Confidence and esteem would be reborn between the good; one would learn to beware of the wicked; and society would thereby be safer. I prefer to have my enemy attack me with open force than to come up treacherously and strike me from behind. What then! Must scandal be combined with crime? I do not know, but I surely wish that deceit were not combined with it. All the maxims about scandal to which we have been treated for so long are very convenient for the vicious: if one wished to follow them rigorously, one must allow himself to be robbed, betrayed, and killed with impunity, and never punish anyone; for a scoundrel on the rack is a very scandalous thing.[43]

As I pointed out above, Rousseau had thoroughly thought through the objections to his position, and his admission that he does not know how to answer the king in regard to the objection of encouraging scandal takes on added significance. It is the only question in the Controversy that Rousseau was unable or unwilling to answer.

But there is more. To understand what is at stake here we must remember the kind of writer that Rousseau was. He claims that he writes "for few Readers,"[44] and that he treats not himself but the truth "carefully."[45] Further, he states: "I have often taken great pains to try to put into a Sentence, a line, a word tossed off as if by chance the result of a long sequence of reflections."[46] It is at this point that he says that those who have not grasped the "trunk of which I have showed them only the branches" that they will not see the unity of his thought. Rousseau claims that if we follow all the maxims on scandal, that is, if we were to live as a

follower of Christ, then we must allow ourselves not only to be robbed and beaten but also to be "betrayed." Now this is an odd word when talking about being attacked and killed, but it is not there by accident.

The response by Rousseau is significant both for what it says and what it leaves out. There is no mention of Jesus or of Christ or of Christianity and yet all are present. The response operates on several levels. In his objection to Rousseau, the king is presupposing that scandal is to be avoided in order to assure public order. Rousseau accepts this presupposition but argues that if one followed this precept rigorously then criminals could not be punished, because "the scoundrel on the rack is a very scandalous thing." This lack of punishment would lead to even greater disorder, forcing one to conclude that sometimes the precepts against scandal must be overridden.

But there is another level of interpretation demanded by the text and that is due to the presence of the word "betrayed." We are not betrayed by criminals when they rob and kill us. The word is there to lead the reader to think of a particular case in which someone was attacked and killed, a particular case of scandal. On this level, the same presupposition holds: scandal is to be avoided to assure public order. And again, it is argued that if the precepts on scandal were followed rigorously, then criminals could not be punished. But this time the result is not an increase in disorder, instead the emphasis is on the fact that if one follows the precepts rigorously then one must imitate Christ and allow oneself to be treated as Christ was treated: to be "robbed, betrayed, and killed with impunity." This Rousseau is not prepared to do, and so the presupposition that the precepts on scandal are to be obeyed must be false. Rousseau is trying to ensure the distinction between himself and the "scoundrel on the rack" is ensured, lest he end up in the same position.

But there is even a deeper level at work here, a level that grounds both of the first two interpretations. The maxims on scandal will cause disorder and will cause someone like Rousseau to be made like Christ because "the scoundrel on the rack is a very scandalous sight." Rousseau is confessing his scandal at this image, and we should note that this is not a self-evident reaction. The thief being punished could well be a gratifying sight. We need to ask ourselves why the scoundrel on the rack is such a scandalous sight, and the answer is that it has become a scandal for those, like Rousseau, who have been infected by the Gospel. It is scandalous because once Christ was that scoundrel on the rack and thereby identified himself with the outcast,

the criminal, and the marginalized. Rousseau has brought Christ into the very center of his system without ever mentioning his name. This is the kind of reading that Rousseau himself demands if we are to grasp the unity of his thought. We have to see that Christ appears twice in the short answer to the objection that he cannot answer. Once as the ultimate origin of scandal, the scoundrel on the rack, and then again as the final result of being the one who refuses to give into scandal and so is robbed, betrayed, and killed. As I wrote in in my book on Rousseau: "Christ occupies both the places of origin and of result. He is the origin and end of the system in a negative sense. Christ functions in this way insofar as he is the origin that gets rejected, and the result it is designed to avoid. In this way, he is the figure in which all the other figures of Rousseau will be inscribed."[47]

Girard is quite clear about what he means by "scandal":

> Behind the *scandalum* in the Latin vulgate and *skandalon* in the original Greek, there is a still older word in the Jewish Bible, a Hebrew word that means the same thing, obstacle, as the other two words, but with more emphasis on the physicality of that obstacle. *Skandalon* is not the inert and always predictable obstacle from which we can easily protect ourselves by keeping clear of it. It is a truly diabolical obstacle against which we repeatedly stumble because it attracts at the very moment that it repels, and it repels at the very moment that it attracts. The reason for this is that my *skandalon* and yours may well turn out to be one and the same. The man whose desire I resent because I imitate it may well be the man who resents my desire because he imitates it. The two of us, in the end, cannot fail to stumble together.[48]

Applied to the texts of Rousseau, scandal enables us to understand not only the extremes we find in the reception of his writing but also their hidden unity. He is feted by some as a new savior and by others condemned as kind of devil. But those who see that he is trying to draw his reader into scandal read him in a forgiving mode. That reader understands his or her own reaction to his writings: the ambiguity that so many experience in their reaction to all of his works. This is a feeling that Kant expressed so well:

> The first impression that an "understanding" reader "who does not read only out of vanity or in order to pass the time" acquires from the writings of Mr. J. J. Rousseau is that he has encountered an uncommon acuity of the mind, a noble impetus of genius and a sensitive soul in such a high degree as has perhaps never before been possessed by a writer of any age or any people. The impression that follows next is bewilderment at strange and absurd opinions, which oppose what is generally held so much that one could easily form the suspicion that, by means of his extraordinary talents, the author only wanted to prove the magical power of eloquence and play the eccentric who stands out among all rivals in wit because of a

> disarming "invisible making" novelty. The third thought, to which one comes only with difficulty because it happens only rarely [the text breaks off] . . .[49]

Rousseau's writings are scandalous in their uncanny ability to both attract and repel at the same time. On another level, but equally scandalous, is the fact that "in order to convince his readers as well as himself that he is not enslaved to mimetic desire, Rousseau assures us, and himself, that he loves himself single-handedly, if I may say, in a solitary fashion, without the help of anyone. Like a god, in other words, he calls his self-love *amour-de-soi* and opposes it to *amour-propre*, which seems to be the same thing but in reality is totally different, because *amour-propre* relies on admirers and imitators."[50]

The fact that scandal is the controlling concept in Rousseau's writings led Girard to write:

> What makes *scandal* superior to all our psychological and psychoanalytical notions is that instead of reflecting the false mastery of the doctor–patient relationship—in which the doctor gives all the answers because he also asks all the question—the scandalous relationship is a reciprocal one—in which the two scandalized human beings imitate each other's desires and become implacable rivals for the same objects.[51]

We read here again words that reflect what Girard wrote in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, namely that "our psychological and psychoanalytical notions" only *reflect* mimetic relations. They do not reveal the truth, instead they make appear the "false mastery of the doctor–patient" relationship. Girard cannot mean that we simply replace the false mastery of the doctor–patient relationship with an equally false mastery of scandal. In another book he warns us, "Only Jesus can master the language of the *skandalon*."[52] We cannot pretend that we stand outside of, above, or beyond scandal and look down on Rousseau and his scandalous entanglements. This too would end up simply *reflecting* the mimetic relationship—that is, reproducing it at a different level. But neither can Girard be suggesting that we simply enter into scandal with Rousseau and become his "implacable rival." That way also ends up just reflecting the mimetic relationship—we fall into a veritable house of mirrors. Rather he is suggesting that we seek the unity in

Rousseau's thought in that which seems to divide it both in itself and from the reader—scandal.

Rousseau's thought is divided in itself insofar as to be scandalized means to be caught in a double-bind: he both embraces Christ and pushes him away, is both attracted to and repulsed by him. This, in turn, divides Rousseau from his reader insofar as Rousseau wants the reader to be scandalized either with him or at him.

Accordingly, I want to be bolder than I have right to be, and rewrite Girard's words. Girard writes that scandal's superiority consists in the fact that it does not *reflect* the false mastery of the doctor–patient relationship, instead it *is* a reciprocal one. I want to write that scandal, instead of reflecting, reveals a reciprocal relationship. Using Girard's recovered notion of scandal as an interpretive tool allows the reader to transform Rousseau's text from a romantic lie into a novelistic truth. Therein lies its power.

NOTES

1. Tzvetan Todorov, *Life in Common: An Essay in General Anthropology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 38.

2. There exists in Rousseau's thought a tension when one examines all of the texts in which he covers *amour-propre*, a tension that parallels Girard's treatment of mimetic desire. One would have to say that overall Rousseau treats *amour-propre* as something neutral, neither good nor bad. It all depends on how it is directed. Indeed, the tutor uses it in his education of Émile, to make the young man human. But there are among the texts striking exceptions, in which it seems that *amour-propre* cannot but go wrong.

3. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Robert Louden and Günter Zöller (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 422.

4. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 88.

5. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, trans. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), 36.

6. Ibid., 91.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 38.

11. Ibid., 39.

12. Ibid., 74.

13. Ibid.

14. Immanuel Kant, *Observations*, ed. Patrick R. Frierson and Paul Guyer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 104–5.

15. Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (London: Penguin, 2018), 64.

16. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 75–76.

17. If one consults the fragments of the drafts of the *Second Discourse* as collated by Heinrich Meier, one sees that at one point Rousseau did intend to treat of the origin of religion, especially of the emergence of a priestly caste as the fruit of "proud curiosity." See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Diskurs Über Die Ungleichheit / Discours Sur L'inégalité* (Stuttgart: UTB, 2008), 396.

18. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 74.

19. Ibid., 52–53.

20. Ibid., 54.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile or on Education*, trans. and ed. Christopher Kelly and Allan Bloom (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2010), 104.

25. Rousseau, *Émile*, 398.

26. Ibid., 399.

27. See Timothy O'Hagan, *Rousseau* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 162–79.

28. Rousseau, *Émile*, 400.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 484.

31. See ibid., 318–321.

32. Ibid., 401.

33. Ibid., 161.

34. Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 73.

35. I am conflating two quotes, the first coming from René Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 16, and the second from René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 256.

36. René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 41.

37. René Girard, "Foreword," in Jeremiah Alberg, *A Reinterpretation of Rousseau: A Religious System* (*New York: Palgrave/Macmillan*, 2007), xii.

38. Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 37.

39. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 19.

40. Eric Gans, "The Victim as Subject: The Esthetico-Ethical System of Rousseau's *Rêveries*," in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Politics, Arts, and Autobiography*, ed. John T. Scott (New York: Routledge, 2006), 402.

41. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, trans. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), 110n.

42. Ibid., 34.

43. Ibid., 49. Emphasis added.

44. Ibid., 184.

45. Ibid., 105.

46. Ibid.
47. Alberg, *A Reinterpretation of Rousseau*, 145.
48. René Girard, “Foreword,” xiii.
49. Kant, *Observations*, 95.
50. René Girard, “Foreword,” xiii.
51. Ibid.
52. René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 194.

Adam Smith

Jean-Pierre Dupuy

I AM GRATEFUL TO ANDREAS WILMES FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUnity to expound for the first time in thirty-five years how I contributed to the solution of one of the most famous open questions in the history of ideas, one that has huge implications for the understanding of our time, thanks to the work of René Girard. This question has to do with the foundation of economics as science in the work of the Scottish moral philosopher Adam Smith (5 June 1723–17 July 1790).

The Adam Smith Problem

At the very beginning of the eighteenth century, in his famous *Fable of the Bees*, Bernard de Mandeville, a physician by profession, provoked a scandal by enunciating the central paradox of the economic paradigm: it is "private vices" that produce "public benefits." The traditional virtues of temperance and moderation merely create an impoverished society, one in which scarcity leads to disorder and impotence. On the contrary, the liberation of the human passions—envy; covetousness; appetite for luxury; pride; and above all the most selfish one, vanity, defined as the love and pursuit of praise—makes it possible to develop industry and commerce and, by generating affluence, to produce a happy, well-ordered, and stable society.

Some fifty years later, Adam Smith published his great treatise, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) [from now on *TMS*].[1] This book examines the major systems of moral philosophy and devotes a long chapter to Mandeville's, condemning it as "licentious" and "wholly pernicious" in

that it "take[s] away altogether the distinction between vice and virtue." In essence, Smith's principal complaint against Mandeville is that the latter played on words. What he called private vices are in fact moral sentiments that remain perfectly virtuous when maintained at a reasonable degree and become vicious only outside certain bounds. Take what Mandeville called vanity: this for him is anything referring to the sentiments of *other people* or third parties. Now, Smith says, the "love of virtue" and the "love of true glory," which are the two "noblest and best passion[s] in human nature," also refer to other people's sentiments—if not to what they are really, at least to what they should be if the third party were an "Impartial Spectator," applauding only what deserves applause. Vanity begins only when we desire and seek from others praise that we do not deserve. Thus, even if there is "a certain remote affinity between them,"[2] insofar as both involve the presence of third parties, the "love of true glory" and vanity could be equally branded as vices only through rhetorical sleight of hand. The presence of the third party is not sufficient to turn virtue into a vice.

Smith's biting criticism of Mandeville is understandable when we recall that Smith is heir to what has been dubbed the "sentimental revolution" occurring in Scotland at the start of the eighteenth century, in reaction against the "cynics" of the seventeenth century—chiefly Hobbes. The "cynics" held that everything in man, including pity, is motivated by selfishness. Mandeville fits right into this tradition. In contrast, the optimistic view of human nature promulgated by the "Scottish Enlightenment" emphasizes men's natural disposition toward compassion, benevolence, and pity. Francis Hutcheson, Smith's mentor at Glasgow, taught that there is in humanity an innate tendency toward "universal benevolence," and his ethical system derived all the virtues from this irresistible propensity for compassion. Smith himself, in *TMS*, depicts the moral and social world as resting on a single principle: *sympathy*.

At this point we need to take time out. Everything said so far is accurate, and yet, if we were to stop here, it would be utterly incomprehensible from the point of view of the history of ideas as it is usually written. Isn't Adam Smith known as the founder of economics, that system in which individuals impelled by self-love pursue their self-interest, contributing to the common good only unconsciously and unintentionally, as if an "invisible hand" automatically realized collective harmony? And most of all, isn't Mandeville generally presented as Smith's far-sighted forerunner?

This problem is of course that of the apparent inconsistency between *TMS* with its cornerstone of sympathy, and *The Wealth of Nations* with its central concept of self-love. Sympathy being confused with benevolence, and self-love with selfishness, the judgment follows that sympathy and self-love are incompatible and the two books are in opposition with each other.

The Germans, including Hegel, baptized this puzzle "Das Adam Smith Problem," and for the longest time, it was resolved in terms of what has been called an *Umschwungstheorie*, that is, a theory of a "turnabout" within Smith's thought. For some time, there was a tendency to think that this alleged turnabout was due to Smith's trip to France in 1766. Supposedly Smith was to have undergone the influence of the French "materialists" (the Physiocrats). Since then, historical research has given the lie to these ill-founded conjectures. Today we know that the broad strokes of Smith's economic system definitely were fully developed by the time he delivered his lectures on jurisprudence, that is, in 1763–1764, and perhaps even as early as 1750. The fact that Smith himself never perceived any dissonance between his two works is amply evidenced by the fact that shortly before his death, he worked on *TMS* once more and published a sixth edition. The fact of having published *The Wealth of Nations* in the meantime did not, however, cause Smith to retract his views on the fundamental role of sympathy.

Today, scholarly opinion generally has it that Smith's thought forms a coherent whole. The ostensible contradictions are resolved as a result of a distinction that is drawn between the different spheres of human activity. In the non-economic sphere, the principles guiding judgments and the motives governing behavior involve the full range of the sentiments and, most importantly, sympathy and benevolence. In the economic sphere, however, self-interest is paramount, and the harmonious cohesion characterizing this sphere of activity "owes nothing to sympathy."[3] The following famous lines from *The Wealth of Nations* are always cited: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest." (I, 2).

It wasn't until 1985 that my research program led me to read *TMS* for the first time and with "Das Adam Smith Problem." I was already familiar with René Girard's work and had a good mastery of the major categories of the theory of mimetic desire, a.k.a. mimetic theory.[4] It didn't take long for me to recognize in the concepts deployed by *TMS* the basic elements of the

theory of mimetic desire avant la lettre, and to understand that what Smith calls self-love, far from being incompatible with sympathy, is in reality the reflexive modality of sympathy.[5] Moreover, sympathy, which joins sentiments together, is bound to engender envy, which implies sentiments in conflict. As soon as this is understood, it appears that Smith ends up with a system that is essentially the same as Mandeville's: a mixture of self-love and envy produces public prosperity.

How in *TMS* sympathy becomes envy—or invidious sympathy—is the key to the Adam Smith problem. This point, which seems limited, actually commands the full comprehension of what constitutes the profound unity of Smith's work as that of a moral philosopher *and* an economist. There is no contradiction between *TMS* and *The Wealth of Nations*. The former fully supports the latter. The domain of morality and that of the economy, far for the latter to be an exception to the realm of the former, proceed from the same source: the dialectic between sympathy and self-love. The theory of mimetic desire allows us to fully grasp this essential but complex idea.

I will proceed as follows. I will first recall that, in the theory of mimetic desire, there is no place for self-love sensu stricto. Instead, we have an elaborate concept: *pseudonarcissism*. I will show that it is the equivalent of Smith's notion of self-love. Then, I will propose a rereading of *TMS* in light of mimetic theory. Drawing a few lessons from this convergence between two major thinkers separated by two centuries, I will conclude by analyzing the role that the economy has played and may still play in social cohesion.

Pseudonarcissism and the Relation to the Object of Desire in Mimetic Theory

A very important theme in Girard, and one that many people on first encountering his work have trouble understanding and assimilating, is the strange game that the relation to the object of desire plays in his theory. On the one hand, Girard insists that mimetic theory completely revises everything that until now had been thought about imitation, so that imitation is understood to bear not only on ways of being and of appearing, of behaving and of feeling, but also on the desire to possess an object; indeed, he goes so far as to coin a term for this urge: acquisitive mimesis.[6] The stronger mimetic rivalry the more desirable the object becomes.

However, the obsession with the model turned only rival becomes such that a tipping point is crossed beyond which the object is transformed into a metaphysical entity, into the hypostatized nothingness that we call prestige. This disappearance of the interest in the object, interest and attention being exclusively transferred to the model-obstacle, is not a novel idea. It was perfectly thought out by Adam Smith's contemporary, Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

> The primitive passions all aimed directly at our happiness and concerned us only with related objects. These passions have *l'amour de soi* as their only principle and are all essentially loving and tender; but *when they are diverted from their objects by obstacles, these passions focus more on overturning the obstacles to happiness than on the actual possession of this happiness*. Then the primitive passions change in nature, becoming irascible and hateful. And this is how *l'amour de soi*, which is an absolutely good sentiment, becomes *l'amour-propre*, a relative sentiment by means of which we compare ourselves to others. It is a sentiment that requires preferences, and the pleasures that it affords are purely negative, being sought not in the satisfaction of our own well-being, but in the misfortune of others.[7]

The ambivalent status of the object in Girard's theory, at the same time the trigger of mimetic desire and bound to vanish when desire gets too intense, is as a matter of fact inscribed in the premises of the theory. Here, I depart from Girard's insistence on the metaphor of the triangle,[8] which I believe has misled many of his readers. If mimesis is universal, the triangle cannot be the originating figure. The mediator's desire must itself be imitated. Whom does the mediator imitate? The simplest (and most complex!) case is when the mediator imitates the subject while the subject imitates the mediator.

Girard writes:

> In the world of internal mediation, the contagion is so widespread that everyone can become his neighbor's mediator without ever understanding the role he is playing. This person, who is a mediator without realizing it, may himself be incapable of spontaneous desire. Thus, he will be tempted to copy the copy of his own desire. What was for him in the beginning only a whim is now transformed into a violent passion. We all know that every desire redoubles when it is seen to be shared. Two identical but opposite triangles are thus superimposed on each other. Desire circulates between the two rivals more and more quickly, and with every cycle it increases in intensity.[9]

For example, A and B imitate each other reciprocally. A is anxious about B's desire, which alone can designate a target for his own desire. Some ephemeral and random sign makes him believe that B has designs on object

O. By rushing to get there first, he signals the stakes of the rivalry. When B in turn imitates A's desire, the initial illusion becomes reality. The first to imagine the other's desire seems not to have been imagining at all; he now has the proof! It is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This figure, which Girard dubs *double mediation*, should be logically the first, since it is the one that generates all the others. Its morphogenetic power is outstanding. One of the features that it brings about is the metaphysical dimension of the object of desire. Mimetic struggle is waged in order to decide which of two competitors will be the exclusive focus of desire. It is as though there were an imaginary object—I shall call it a "quasi-object"—that the rivals seek to gain possession of, since triumph in this contest channels the admiring regard of others toward the victor and further increases the chance that he will continue to possess the quasi-object at the next moment. The convergence of desire is a self-reinforcing mechanism—what Girard would call a positive feedback. The quasi-object is *the* object of desire. However—and this is the paradox of mimetic desire—one must disavow any claim to it oneself in order that the mediator may possess it—and this, not through either generosity or some sort of masochism, but because the quasi-object has value, even existence, only if it is possessed by a model. The double bind of mimetic desire therefore assumes the following form: I wish to possess the quasi-object because it has value, but for it to have value, I must in no way possess it. If the mediator possesses the quasi-object, I want to have it, but, if I gain possession of it, it vanishes into thin air. For me to be able to desire it and gain possession of it, it must exist, and therefore the mediator must possess it. But in conquering it, I lose it.

In place of a triangle, one finds a very different form: on the one hand, a subject; on the other, *in the subject's imagination*, an exclusive relation between another subject and a quasi-object. The key word here is "exclusive," for the relation that the subject constructs in his mind excludes him, and it is because it excludes him that he feels cruelly deprived of the very property he ascribes to the other—self-sufficiency. Note that we are not dealing here with a triangle, even if it were to be saddled with the prefix "pseudo-" or "quasi-," because the subject is not faced with two elements, another subject and an object; instead, he sees the relation between this other subject and the quasi-object, which for him constitutes an indissociable and unanalyzable whole.

The plausibility of this reading is further strengthened if we consider another stock figure of mimetic theory: *pseudonarcissism*.

In the hell of imitative rivalry imagined by Girard, the secret of success is the ability to dissemble. Making a public display of one's desires is a recipe for failure. Thus, Girard speaks of *"askesis* for the sake of desire."[10] This form of self-discipline, like that of the mystic, of which it is the perfect and reversed image, is the key to wisdom. Indifference, withdrawal into oneself, is what moves others and ensures their submission. The subject is forever searching in others for the self-sufficiency that he is acutely conscious of lacking himself, and thinks it is to be found in a person whose aloofness appears to mean that he has no need of anyone, someone who relies on his own devices, who does not suffer from the sense of inadequacy that causes the subject such pain. Is this show of indifference authentic, or is it faked? In mimetic competition, the best faker is someone who does not know that he is faking, or, better still, someone who is *not* faking. A naturally cold and insensitive temperament can be an asset, no less than stupidity. Girard quotes a remark by French philosopher Alain that would be condemned by the politically correct of our own day: "The amorous person desires the soul, that is why the coquette's stupidity looks like cunning."[11] There is no greater source of support, though, than the admiring regard of others. "Nothing is more apt to divert us from others and turn us back on ourselves, reassuring us about ourselves," Girard says, "than the spectacle of others taking us for their object of desire, thus conferring upon us the blessed self-sufficiency of which they deprive themselves."[12] Conversely, the feeling of mastery that results from it attracts new and ever more intense desires. Success in one's own eyes and success in the eyes of others are not two independent poles, or things that vary inversely with respect to each other; like everything that is subject to mimetic desire, they participate in a relation of circular causality, influencing each other in a positive feedback loop. Such a dynamic is eminently unstable: one spark is enough to cause it to converge in one direction; another spark will cause it to converge in the other. Whether one is welcomed or turned away in even the most commonplace encounters of daily life thereby assumes considerable importance. Anyone who wishes to succeed has only a single rule to follow, namely, to persuade others that success has already been achieved.

Pseudonarcissism is in fact a particular case of double mediation, in which model and object occupy the same apex. Two concurrent desires imitate and excite each other: the lover imitates the desire of the coquette by desiring her; the coquette imitates the desire of her lover in desiring herself. In the mimetic realm, self-love is indeed possible, but it too is mediated by a third party.

We are now well equipped to propose a radically novel solution to the "Adam Smith problem."

Invidious Sympathy in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

The goal, once again, is to establish that self-love is not selfishness and sympathy is not benevolence, and to bring out the relationship between sympathy and self-love. The only evidence that can be presented in defense of my thesis is that which can be provided by Smith's text, yet this evidence is quite illuminating. I shall be proceeding in my analysis exclusively from the point of view of *TMS*. In fact, I believe that the principle articulating the relationship between *TMS* and *The Wealth of Nations* is wholly contained within the former.[13]

The Logic of Sympathy

SYMPATHY IS NOT BENEVOLENCE

The fact that Smith belongs to the tail end of the Scottish Enlightenment's sentimental revolution obviously only encourages the interpretive error whereby sympathy is confounded with benevolence. Smith, much like his friend David Hume, undeniably partakes of this sentimentalism. And yet, when it comes to one fundamental issue, Smith does break with that tradition. He claims that of all the moral passions it is *self-love*, or the interest that one has for one's own person, that is the strongest. Although benevolence possesses a superior moral value, it only plays a secondary role in human affairs. Moreover, Smith contends that actions motivated by *self-love* are not necessarily devoid of moral worth.

By all appearances the entire structure of *TMS* depends on sympathy, and benevolence would seem to play only a minor role. Thus, it makes sense to conclude that sympathy is not coextensive with benevolence.

In order to grasp fully the originality of Smith's concept of sympathy, we must understand that it finds its origin in a very modern vision of society. This vision foregrounds the individual's radical solitude and the irreducible distance between men, one that can only be bridged by the workings of the imagination. In our imagination, we are constantly putting ourselves in the place of others, but in fact we never leave our own. And thus, sympathy "does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it."[14]

The importance that Smith attaches to imagination is a first point of contact between his theory of mind and Girard's. The human subject as conceived by Smith is irremediably locked into the world of his own sensibility. What the imagination discovers is only the subject's own sensations, never those of others: "It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy."[15] And yet Smith, much like Hutcheson and the "benevolists" before him, refuses to fall into the Hobbesian trap that makes all passions a matter of selfishness.

SYMPATHY DOES NOT FIND ITS ORIGIN IN SELFISHNESS

Smith asks us to consider a situation in which we sympathize with the terrible grief of someone who has just lost his only son. He claims that what we experience is not the suffering that we would feel if, while retaining all our real psychological and sociological features, we were to imagine that we once had a son and had just lost him. For the compassion involved in such a case would be nothing more than the selfish fear of having a similar misfortune occur to oneself. Rather, Smith claims that the workings of the imagination do not allow us to exchange only our circumstances with someone but also our personalities and characters. In thought, I becomes the other. Otherwise, he goes on to ask, how could we explain the fact that a man can sympathize with the suffering experienced by a woman in labor?

Who, then, is this subject engaged in a sympathetic identification with the other? Is he only really himself, given that he can never really escape from the prison-house of his own sensations? Or is he really the other in imagination—for otherwise sympathy would only be selfishness? In Smith's theory what is real and what is imaginary never cease to interact. Smith notes that when someone sympathizes with the pain experienced by someone else, the subject can never really quite rid himself of the thought that this identification is of an imaginative nature only. And as this nagging

and parasitical thought dulls the sensibility, the process of identifying with someone else is always a partial failure.

Constantly torn between himself and others, the subject as it is conceived by Smith suffers from a split that is constitutive of his very being. It is radically different, not only from the *homo oeconomicus* of the economic theories that follow in Smith's wake but also from the rational beings postulated by the theories of the social contract. That too brings it closer to the Girardian subject.

SYMPATHY IS NOT CONTAGION, BUT . . .

David Hume too gives center stage to sympathy. It is unambiguously presented as a principle involving the communication between persons of sentiments, emotions, judgments, manners, customs, and desires. In his *Essays*, he observes that "the human spirit is by nature very imitative." And in his *Treatise on Human Nature*, he says that "men's souls are mirrors for each other."[16] In this same work he attempts to define what he calls elsewhere *contagion*: "So close and intimate is the correspondence of human souls, that no sooner any person approaches me, than he diffuses on me all his opinions, and draws along my judgment in a greater or lesser degree."[17]

Things are undeniably more complicated in Smith's case. First of all, he gives sympathy a passive sense whereby it is simply a matter of acknowledging that there is a correspondence between the spectator's and the actor's sentiments. This correspondence is the cornerstone for his theory of morality. Sympathy in this sense is the impulse that causes us to imagine ourselves in someone else's place and thereby to experience sentiments that may be or not in accord with hers. If this accord can take place, we morally approve her conduct; if not, we disapprove of it. Such is the basis of Smith's theory of morality: moral judgment involves either approval or disapproval, and approval rests on our capacity to sympathize.

Smith, however, introduces a supplementary axiom into his system, the significance of which will prove to be crucial. The axiom in question is what he calls the "pleasure of mutual sympathy": a harmony of sentiments is pleasurable for both the spectator and the actor. In fact, this harmony turns out to be one of the principal sources of pleasure in life. *TMS* frequently expresses the actor's fear of finding himself before an unsympathetic audience. The actor's pleasure is increased, or his sorrow

decreased, as the case may be, when he notes that the audience is relating to him sympathetically. In the case of the spectator, things are not quite so simple. Hume put his finger on this problem and thus incited Smith to make his thoughts more precise. Two distinct sentiments must be distinguished in the event that the spectator sympathizes with the misfortune of another person. For on the one hand, there is the sentiment of sympathy, which, in this case, would be a feeling of pain. On the other hand, however, there is the sentiment of pleasure that finds its basis in the fact that the spectator knows his feelings to be in agreement with those of the observed party. In other words, the spectator approves of the feelings experienced by the misfortunate person.

Generally speaking, the actor has more at stake in "the pleasure of mutual sympathy" than the spectator, for everyone seeks approval from others for the feelings and passions motivating his actions. Now the actor knows by experience just how difficult it is to put oneself in the position of someone else. *He puts himself in the place of the spectator trying to put herself in the place of the actor*. We witness at work here the rigorous logical process whereby Smith recursively applies the operator sympathy to itself, giving it, in this manner, its true significance. This operator carried to the second power is that of active sympathy: we actively seek the sympathy of others, i.e., we seek to sympathize with the fact of others sympathizing with us.

The actor knows that the spectator will have trouble sympathizing with him, and he desires the spectator's sympathy: so, he adapts his own sentiments to the spectator's as he conceives them. His evaluation of the situation is a copy of the other's evaluation of the same situation. Sympathy is in the end a principle of imitation or contagion of sentiments, but, contrary to what the theatrical metaphor would suggest, *it is not the spectator who imitates the actor, but rather the actor who imitates the spectator*. However, in Smith's social theater, everybody is at once a spectator and an actor. Via a rather complex detour, we rediscover a principle of contagion that resembles in some ways Hume's conception of contagion.

The following citation from Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* shows us the manner in which active sympathy might make this process more complex:

> In general, we may remark, that the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each other's emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated, and may decay away by insensible degrees. Thus, the pleasure, which a rich man receives from his possessions, being thrown upon the beholder, causes a pleasure and esteem; which sentiments again, being perceiv'd and sympathiz'd with, encrease the pleasure of the possessor; and being once more reflected, become a new foundation for pleasure and esteem in the beholder.[18]

Let us at this point simply say that the pleasure derived from sympathy functions as a sort of ethical regulator that tends to reduce the differences between the various feelings that are brought into contact with each other. It tends to bring judgments and evaluations closer together. Thus, this pleasure increases at the very same time that it enhances social harmony. The pleasurable experience of sympathy is, then, *auto*-regulative.

In the guise of a conclusion to this section let us recall once again the distance separating the Smithian (or Humean) subject from the *homo oeconomicus* who will appear on the scene at a later date. The latter is an isolated and self-sufficient being, capable of self-determination. The former lives constantly in the eye of the other. This Smithian subject is fundamentally *mimetic*, always ready to lose itself in the many mirrors held forth by others. Even if the argument that leads to this conclusion is different, actually much more involved than Girard's, the resonance between the two is conspicuous.

The Ambivalence of Sympathy

THE SCIENCE OF MORALITY

We have seen that Smith's theory of moral judgment was based on the spectator's feelings. It is for this reason that his theory of consciousness, or of reflexive moral judgment, is presented as a "theory of moral sentiments."

We saw that sympathy had a tendency to be applied to itself; the same holds for the moral judgment that it engenders. A spectator approves of a given agent's behavior if he is able to sympathize with the passions or feelings motivating the actions in question. We showed that the recursion of sympathy is tantamount to the actor's imitation of the spectator. From this we conclude that an agent approves of his own behavior if and only if an observer approves of it. In Smith's theory virtue is everything that incites an observer's approval. The task of accounting for the objectivity, universality,

and binding nature of the moral law becomes a question of showing how these features find their genesis in the context of the spectator's stance and position.

What really defines the spectator is his position and the particular perspective that it gives him. The spectator stands outside the sphere of action. He does not take part in it and is properly speaking a "bystander." The paradox typifying the spectator is as follows: on the one hand, he maintains exteriority and indifference in relation to the other. It is not the spectator who suffers, enjoys, and acts, but the agent. Yet, at the same time, the spectator is also involved and occupies a position of interiority insofar as he tends to sympathize with the actor. Now, the actor knows about this position, for he can infer its salient features from all those instances in his own life when he was actually in this very situation. Far from being a transcendental ideal, then, the spectator figure turns out to be a kind of average that emerges from everyone's daily experiences of life in society.

Even when the spectator ("the man without") is actually present in flesh and blood, we know that he is imagined by the actor. It is only in thought that the actor puts himself in the spectator's place, for he imagines the spectator imagining his own situation. The actor only retains the spectator's position and the point of view that it affords, for he does not have access to anything else, especially not to the spectator's *real* feelings. *So, in the final instance it does not make the least bit of difference whether the position of the spectator is really filled*. When the spectator's position is empty, the actor occupies it fictitiously by an act of the imagination through which he becomes his own double. He watches himself as would an "impartial" spectator. This is what we call the conscience ("the man within").

Between the man without and the man within exists a complex network of relations. Sometimes their relation takes the form of a struggle between doubles. This struggle is a matter of the opposition between the ideal of a conscience that is definitively detached from its social origins and the reality of an ever-changing public opinion. Smith devotes an astonishing chapter to the "love of praise" and the "love of praiseworthiness"—that is, the desire to be able to approve of oneself.[19] In this chapter Smith would like to demonstrate that while the desire to be worthy of the approbation of others stems from the desire simply to win their approbation, it nonetheless can acquire a certain degree of autonomy, and a relative independence, from it. He would also like to convince us that the moral conscience constitutes a

"higher tribunal" than the opinion of ordinary spectators. But it is not that simple! We could for instance very well reason as follows: what is the point of being recognized if one knows that one does not really merit the recognition? And if one knows that one deserves recognition, what does it matter if the others do not?

> When a man has bribed all the judges, the most unanimous decision of the court, though it may gain him his law-suit, cannot give him any assurance that he was in the right: and had he carried on his law-suit merely to satisfy himself that he was in the right, he never would have bribed the judges.[20]

Perhaps, but in Smith's days as in our own, men reward their admirers. There is a good reason to that: in those instances when the higher tribunal—our conscience—proffers no sure guidelines, we are obliged to turn to the general public for criteria of excellence and merit.

We now understand how it is that Smith accounts for the binding and objective character of moral judgments, as if moral judgment were either dictated by some transcendent instance or given to mankind at birth in the form of an innate faculty. The logical form that characterizes the source of moral judgment is a self-referential loop that puts a subject in contact with himself through an intermediary instance that is society. Although the subject seems to discover the moral law within himself, this law is, in fact, external to him. And its exteriority is directly related to the exteriority typifying society's relationship to the individual. If one may speak here of transcendence, it is in the Durkheimian sense, that is, in terms of the transcendent nature of the social totality in relation to its parts. In fact, Smith's sociological theory of morality makes him seem much more like the precursor to the Durkheim of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* than the forerunner to the rationalist philosophers who were instrumental in making political economy into what we know it as today.[21]

The rapprochement with Durkheimian sociology should not, however, be pushed too far. In Smith's social philosophy, the transcendence of society, far from being a given, "always already" there, is brought about by the self-constitution of the social system itself. We are dealing with the endogenous production of an exteriority, a case of social bootstrapping or social self-transcendence. Smith's social logic is by far much more advanced than Durkheim's, and it heralds Girard's.

TMS shows precisely how the principle of sympathy is capable of engendering an order satisfying the conditions necessary for the preservation of society. This is the marvelous accomplishment of the "invisible hand"—this hand of a God who, although he does not interfere with the functioning of the system, nonetheless originally conceived it in such a way that there would be a guaranteed compatibility between a teleological requirement and the purely causal functioning of the system.

THE SCIENCE OF SOCIETY (ECONOMICS)

Now, at this point, a major difficulty arises, one that was destined to torment Smith throughout his life, finally causing him to add a key chapter to the sixth edition of *TMS* (and thus long after the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*). This chapter is entitled "Of the corruption of our moral sentiments, which is occasioned by this disposition to admire the rich and the great, and to despise or neglect persons of poor and mean condition."[22]

The difficulty in question is as follows: sympathy does indeed engender a social order compatible with the requirements of the conservation of society, but this order is not entirely compatible with the demands of morality. A science of morality is not, then, an exhaustive science of social phenomena.

In order to understand this point fully, we must take up once more the question of the equivalence between active sympathy and the imitation of the spectator. You can only sympathize with yourself to the exact same extent that others sympathize with you. In other words, you can only love yourself to the same extent that others love you. *Self-love* coincides with the longing to be loved by others and is simply a particular case of the principle of active, reflexive sympathy. Upon careful reflection, we recognize in this principle of reflexive or active sympathy a strange inversion of the evangelical message. The following is Smith's actual formulation: "As to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the great law of Christianity, so it is the great precept of nature to love ourselves only as we love our neighbour, or, *what comes to the same thing, as our neighbour is capable of loving us*."[23]

We saw that mimetic theory has a place for self-love, provided that it is mediated by a third party. In *TMS*, this third party has a name: the spectator. Smith's self-love is what Girard calls pseudonarcissism. Far from being

incompatible with sympathy, self-love stems from it. It is sympathy applied to itself. *Quod erat demonstrandum*.

Now a bifurcation occurs here in relation to the following question: who is the spectator? Is he the "man within" or the "man without"? We remain wholly within the sphere of morality in the event that the answer to this question is "the man within." In this case self-love would take the form of a stoic virtue, self-command, i.e., the ability to control one's passions and to keep them within the bounds that are most likely to win sympathy from the impartial spectator.

The case is, however, somewhat different if we are dealing with real spectators and if the actor were more desirous of being praised and admired than of *deserving* praise and admiration. The actor would know that there are more expeditious ways of winning praise. Self-love here takes the form of self-interest, of the economic motive, the desire to improve one's material condition, to increase one's wealth. Not because the riches acquired would be in themselves a source of satisfaction—as a good Scot, Smith has no words harsh enough to express his scorn for this notion—but because they would have the property of attracting to their possessor the sympathy of those who lack them. These people mistakenly attribute virtues to wealth that it does not have. But it is because they are mistaken, and because they covet it, that in the end they are *not* mistaken. Wealth indeed has the virtues with which it is credited, but only because it *has been credited* with them. It is this fool's game, a giant variation on the theme of sympathy, that generates *The Wealth of Nations* and what we call the economy—but not without causing grave harm to morality. Let me stress this: the supposed founding father of economics took what we call capitalist economy as a vast scheme of collective self-deception.

The Wealth of Nations will elaborate on the functioning of the economy. *TMS* takes up the daunting task of explaining why and how it is corrupt. This is in a chapter of *TMS* significantly called "Of the corruption of our moral sentiments, which is occasioned by this disposition to admire the rich and the great, and to despise or neglect persons of poor and mean condition."[24]

There we find the famous demonstration in which many commentators have claimed to find the source for modern theories about "conspicuous consumption" starting with the work of Veblen. This is a serious

misinterpretation, and I will therefore cite this crucial passage at some length:

> It is because mankind are disposed to sympathize more entirely with our joy than with our sorrow, that we make parade of our riches, and conceal our poverty. . . . For to what purpose is all the toil and bustle of this world? What is the end of avarice and ambition, of the pursuit of wealth, of power, and pre-eminence? Is it to supply the necessities of nature? The wages of the meanest labourer can supply them. . . . Do they [those who are fortunate] imagine that their stomach is better, or their sleep sounder, in a palace than in a cottage? The contrary has been so often observed, and, indeed, is so very obvious, though it had never been observed, that there is nobody ignorant of it. From whence, then, arises that emulation which runs through all the different ranks of men, and what are the advantages which we propose by that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and approbation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. It is the vanity, not the ease, or the pleasure, which interests us. But vanity is always founded upon the belief of our being the object of attention and approbation. The rich man glories in his riches, because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world, and that mankind are disposed to go along with him in all those agreeable emotions with which the advantages of his situation so readily inspire him. . . . The poor man, on the contrary, is ashamed of his poverty. He feels that it either places him out of the sight of mankind, or, that if they take any notice of him, they have, however, scarce any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress which he suffers. He is mortified upon both accounts; for though to be overlooked, and to be disapproved of, are things entirely different, yet as obscurity covers us from the daylight of honour and approbation, to feel that we are taken no notice of, necessarily damps the most agreeable hope, and disappoints the most ardent desire, of human nature. The poor man goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of a crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel. . . . The man of rank and distinction, on the contrary, is observed by all the world. Everybody is eager to look at him, and to conceive, at least by sympathy, that joy and exultation with which his circumstances naturally inspire him. . . . It is upon him that their passions seem all to wait with expectation, in order to receive that movement and direction which he shall impress upon them. . . . It is this, which, notwithstanding the restraint it imposes, notwithstanding the loss of liberty with which it is attended, *renders greatness the object of envy*, and compensates, in the opinion of mankind, all that toil, all that anxiety, all those mortifications, which must be undergone in the pursuit of it; and what is of yet more consequence, all that leisure, all that ease, all that careless security, which are forfeited for ever by the acquisition.[25]

Smith is trying to explain a fact that he has observed and that does not go without saying: those who are rich and powerful display their riches in order to attract the gazes and admiration of others. Now, this phenomenon is problematic. Material wealth and especially movable property has not always and everywhere been a mark of distinction that one displays in order to win the applause of the masses. As Smith knows very well, the fear of envy—of one's own envy as well as of that of others—can cause people to hide their possessions and feign destitution.

Ever since the impact of Veblen's thought, little concern has been given to such subtleties. Thus, Veblen's many disciples claim that an innate desire for distinction motivates the human species to pursue prestige, the recognition of others, through conspicuous consumption. Yet the principle of *distinction* is a principle of opposition, rivalry, and war. And thus, Veblen and his disciples are up against a major obstacle: they have to make plausible the idea that we seek a *good* by seeking the admiration of others, an admiration that stems from our having triumphed over them. Yet there is plenty of evidence to suggest that such disparaging and triumphant behavior can only win us the envy, jealousy, and hatred of others. Veblen tries to resolve this difficulty by bluntly assimilating envy to admiration, which simply puts an end to the discussion.

Unlike Veblen, Smith does not ground the social dynamic in a principle of distinction or in some pursuit of difference. Rather, not unlike Girard, he accounts for the stability of social relations by invoking a principle of harmony and a desire for similarity: sympathy. What does the rich or powerful person really want when he attracts the gaze of others? The pleasure of their sympathy, that is, the joy of experiencing a *harmony* between their feelings and his own. What do the spectators who observe this rich person stand to gain? The pleasure of sympathy, i.e., the enjoyment of a vicarious taste of success. In this manner, everybody benefits: the rich man knows that he really does occupy a desirable position, and the spectators participate in a happiness beyond their means.

But has Smith really managed to rid himself of the problem of envy? The attentive reader will have noticed a slippage toward the end of the citation, a furtive "greatness, the object of envy," which contradicts the premises of the entire demonstration: "Joy is a pleasant emotion, and we gladly abandon ourselves to it upon the slightest occasion. We readily, therefore, sympathize with it in others, *whenever we are not prejudiced by envy*."[26] This contradiction is not, in fact, the product of mediocre and negligent thinking. Smith locates this contradiction in the very logic of interpersonal relations. It should be emphasized that "sympathy" for the success of the great and powerful has nothing to do with the feeling of benevolence (just as there clearly is no such thing as compassion for the misfortunate). This feeling of sympathy cannot be distinguished from the desire to appropriate the possessions belonging to these great men. The desire to be like them is inevitably also a desire to have what they have: that

is the essence of mimetic desire. As a result, the gazes directed at a model are always ambiguous. From the point of view of the model, these gazes have a positive value, on the one hand, for they confirm the value of his position. On the other hand, however, these same looks constitute an evil, for they contain a potential threat. From the point of view of those doing the looking, their gaze is a good because it provides them with a sense of direction that they lacked, it attracts them to that which is worth their pursuit and effort. On the other hand, however, this same gaze constitutes an evil because it unleashes all the torments associated with envy. Evil is inscribed within good; the maggot is at home inside the fruit. This is the *corruption of morality*.

In his introduction to *TMS*, E. G. West paraphrases these words as follows: "those instincts in human beings which are the supposed agencies for ultimate harmony are both constructive and destructive."[27] Although envy and sympathy are opposed to each other, they are indistinguishable. The principle of union underlying the stability of social distinction is simultaneously a principle of opposition and, thus, a threat to this stability. Sympathy *contains* envy in both senses of the word "contain": to have within oneself and to keep in check. This is exactly the lesson of the theory of mimetic desire.

It is possible to reach a greater level of abstraction. Let us reiterate some of the main points of our discussion. The operator of self-reflexivity is none other than the spectator's gaze. A subject can only refer to himself by referring to the spectator's act of referring to him. This is the logic of *indirect self-reference*.

Some examples: I can only judge myself on the basis of the impartial spectator's judgment of me; this is called having a *conscience*. I can only love myself to the extent that the spectator loves me: this is called *self-love* and one of its possible modalities is the virtue of *self-command*.

Let us now deal with the relation between subject and object: I judge an exclusive object to be desirable if and only if I believe that the spectator considers it desirable. If, then, in order to desire an object I must offer it as fodder to the other's desire, I venture onto a path that is perilous by nature, as the theory of mimetic desire has abundantly shown. And if we are to believe Smith, this sort of hazardous desire is what underlies our interest in "economic" forms of wealth. True enough, in the case of this kind of desire, I do win the "sympathy" of my spectators and in so doing nourish my sense

of self-esteem. Yet this sympathy cannot be distinguished from its opposite: envy. This combination of self-love and envy turns out, then, to be the element that is most crucial to the permanence and stability of the social order. And it is in the paradoxical relationship between self-love and envy that we detect profound similarities between the thought of Smith and Mandeville. Thus, we understand why in spite of his harsh criticisms of Mandeville, Smith was forced to concede that there was much truth in his provocative essay.

What it is crucial to understand is that the combination of self-love and envy is, just like virtuous self-love and conscience, an emergent manifestation of the same operator through the workings of which society self-organizes: sympathy. Sympathy is not a desire; it is an operator that bears on desires. Another name for it is *mimesis*, in the special sense that Girard gave to that term.

To Go Further

The contribution of Girard's general anthropology to the understanding of the essential role that the economy plays in the modern world goes way beyond the exegesis of Smith's work that I have just proposed.

Girard's hypothesis, as he calls it, asserts that the sacred was produced by a mechanism of self-externalization, so that violence, in projecting itself beyond the domain of human control by means of ritual practices and systems of rules, prohibitions, and obligations, became self-limiting. On this view, the sacred is identified with a "good" form of institutionalized violence that holds in check "bad" anarchic violence. The desacralization of the world that modernity brought about is built upon a kind of knowledge, or suspicion perhaps, that gradually insinuated itself in human thinking—the suspicion that good and bad violence are not opposites but actually one and the same, that at bottom there is no difference between them. This knowledge, "hidden since the foundation of the world," was revealed to us by the Passion of Christ and the accounts and interpretations of it that have been given to us in the New Testament.

This is not the place to discuss the hypothesis itself. However, a question arises that Girard's anthropology poses but fails to answer. Revelation, it holds, has worked over the centuries to destroy the effectiveness of

sacrificial systems, with the result that we now find ourselves left to face our own violence alone. This is the devilish trick that Christianity has played on mankind—and why Christianity seemed so dangerous to thinkers like Machiavelli. How, then, are we to account for the fact that humanity itself has not, or has not yet, suffered the fate to which uncountably many communities since the beginning of human history have fallen victim: self-annihilation through internecine violence?

To this question I replied, in a book written more than forty years ago with the Canadian philosopher Paul Dumouchel, that economic activity represents a continuation of the sacred: like the sacred, it blocks violence through violence, only the means it employs are altogether different.[28] The economy *contains* violence, in both senses of the word. The economy has violence in it, but it also acts as a barrier against violence. The ambivalence of economic life in relation to evil, in other words, exactly mirrors the ambivalence of the sacred in relation to violence.

All things considered, it appears that Smith is indeed the worthy founding father of the science of the economy, as the economists proclaim —except that they don't know why.

NOTES

1. In what follows, citations will be to E. G. West's edition of Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1976). Henceforth *TMS*.

2. Smith, *TMS*, 487–92.

3. D. D. Raphael, "The Impartial Spectator," in *Essays on Adam Smith*, ed. A. S. Skinner and T. Wilson (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1975), 83–99, especially 96.

4. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, "Le signe et l'envie," in *L'Enfer des choses*, ed. Paul Dumouchel and Jean-Pierre Dupuy (Paris, Seuil, 1979).

5. A number of publications in scholarly journals followed my discovery, but I never mentioned in them its source in Girard's theory. When you study an eighteenth century author, you don't mention, in general, a twentieth century scholar among its precursors. An anecdote illustrates this point. The first important publication appeared in French in *L'Année sociologique*, the journal founded by Emile Durkheim. Its editor-in-chief at the time was an eminent sociologist, who, the year before, had published a devastating critique of Girard. He published my article with great enthusiasm, without suspecting in the least that it was a mere illustration of the fecundity of mimetic theory, which he had run down just a few months earlier. This article was "De l'émancipation de l'économie: Retour sur 'Das Adam Smith Problem,'" *L'Année Sociologique* 37 (1987): 311–42. Many years later, my Girardian reading of *TMS* appeared in the holy of holies of Smithian studies, *The Adam Smith Review*, under the title: "Invidious Sympathy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*," *Adam Smith Review* 2 (2006): 96–121. Once again, any reference to Girard would have been unbecoming. That is why I could write at the beginning that this is the first time in thirty-five years

that I acknowledge my debt to mimetic theory in my modest contribution to the history of economic thought.

6. Or, at times, mimesis of appropriation.

7. *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jaques: manuscrit "Condillac", avec les variantes ultérieures*, ed. Jean-François Perrin (Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2016), 927–32. My translation. It is impossible to translate *amour-de-soi* and *amour-propre* in English. By their construction, they mean exactly the same thing in French, despite the fact that Rousseau gives them opposite meanings. The only acceptable translation *for both* is *self-love*. This article is not intended to compare Smith and Rousseau. If it were, we would be forced to conclude that the Scot is infinitely shrewder than the citizen of Geneva.

8. Before coining the phrase "mimetic desire," Girard used "triangular desire."

9. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 99.

10. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 284.

11. Ibid.

12. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 371.

13. Smith always maintained that his major work was *TMS* and not *The Wealth of Nations*.

14. Smith, *TMS*, 51.

15. Ibid., 48.

16. David Hume, A *Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1978), 365. Hutcheson himself said that sympathy was "a kind of contagion or infection."

17. Ibid., 592.

18. Ibid.

19. Smith, *TMS*, 208–31.

20. Ibid., 224.

21. Emile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris: PUF, 1979).

22. Smith, *TMS*, I, iii, 3.

23. Ibid., 72. My emphasis.

24. Ibid., 126.

25. Ibid., 112–14. My emphasis.

26. Ibid., 100. My emphasis.

27. Ibid., 39.

28. Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumouchel, *L'Enfer des choses: René Girard et la logique de l'économie* (Paris : Seuil, 1979). This publication was followed by many others, especially Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Le Sacrifice et l'envie: Le libéralisme aux prises avec la justice sociale* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1992); Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Paul Dumouchel, *The Ambivalence of Scarcity and Other Essays* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014); Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Economy and the Future. A Crisis of Faith*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014); André Orléan, *L'Empire de la valeur* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

Immanuel Kant

Jeremiah Alberg

THE PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM OF IMMANUEL KANT (1724–1804) IS often, and rightly, associated with his new attempt in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787) to answer the question, "What can I know?" Somewhat less appreciated, but no less important, is the fact that the answer to this question was always in the service of the deeper, more fundamental questions of understanding how to live and what it means to be a human. The *whole* critical enterprise was born from Kant's encounter with the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Kant's awareness of the crisis of reason came through this encounter. He realized not just the need for some kind of moral general will but also of the ways in which the social being (read: mimetic being) of humans leads to an undoing of reason itself and then to conflict, disorder, and violence. Understood in this way, Kant has something to offer students of mimetic theory in that he demonstrates the way in which the inevitable conflict *between* human beings gets reflected and refracted in an individual's consciousness as well.

First, I will show that from the 1760s on Kant exhibited an intense interest in mimetic phenomena due to his reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Second, I will show that Kant's consideration of the philosophy of history, again strongly influenced by Rousseau, not only comes close to Girardian themes but benefits by being supplemented by Girard's scapegoat mechanism. Finally, I will show that Girardians can profit from a careful study of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, because Kant's analysis reveals the source of mimetic doubling in our rationality itself, a doubling that leads to a contradiction within reason itself and demands a critical solution.

Immanuel Kant Reads Jean-Jacques Rousseau

In the mid-1760s, Kant reread the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and left a series of jottings in his own copy of *Observations on the Sublime and the Beautiful*, which he had interleaved with blank pages. These are now known as *Remarks on Observations on the Sublime and the Beautiful* (hereafter *Remarks*). These *Remarks* remained more or less unknown until they were published in volume 20 of the Academy Edition in 1942. Kant, of course, never intended them for publication; rather, they seem to be a series of notes he made for himself as he worked through some Rousseau's writings (certainly *Emile* is the source of some his thoughts).

Given the centrality of mimetic phenomena to Rousseau's thought, and given the centrality of Rousseau's writings to Kant's development, it should come as no surprise that Kant came to reflect upon these phenomena under the influence of Rousseau. This interest got inflected by a preexisting tendency Kant had of looking at both sides of any question. This tendency is now applied to such topics as the desire for equality, for honor, and other related issues.

Let us begin by looking at a famous autobiographical note we find in the *Remarks*. It concerns Kant's self-understanding of what Rousseau had done for him.

> I myself am a researcher by inclination. I feel the entire thirst for cognition and the eager restlessness to proceed further in it, as well as the satisfaction at every acquisition. There was a time when I believed this alone could constitute the honor of humankind, and I despised the rabble who knows nothing. *Rousseau* set me right. This blinding prejudice vanishes, I learn to honor human beings, and I would feel by far less useful than the common laborer if I did not believe that this consideration could impart a value to all others in order to establish the rights of humanity.[1]

The Kant who existed before this encounter with Rousseau was in love with knowledge for its own sake and worked at acquiring it. He held "the rabble" in contempt. Rousseau turned Kant. He "set him right." Kant learned to "honor human beings" and to see that his own work had to contribute to establishing their rights. This was an enormous change in his existential outlook.[2]

If we look, not at a single entry in the *Remarks*, but rather at the collection, we have to note how many of them have to do with the desire for equality and the drive for honor that comes from it, as well as the delusions

that result from living for the opinions of others. At one point, Kant even draws out an analogy between these social forces and the physical forces of repulsion and attraction.[3] To give just one example: "That the drive for honor comes from the desire for equality is to be seen from this. Would a savage search for another in order to show him his advantages? If he can be without him, he will enjoy his freedom. Only if he must be together with him, will he attempt to outdo him, therefore the desire for honor is mediate."[4]

The final point is also not contained in any single entry, but running through the *Remarks*, like a kind of red flag, are notes on the coquette. Again, just one example: "The *coquette* has the intention of inspiring inclinations, even though she has none herself; it is a mere game of vanity."[5] Kant is fascinated with the coquette and her influence.

Kant no longer holds his fellow human being in contempt, and therefore he has to look at things from both sides of the rivalrous parties. Realities like envy, vanity, and jealousy are no longer simply other people's problems but affect all of us and distort the way we see things. This distortion goes deep. Kant is concerned about the kind of delusions we suffer when we are seeking to hold the position of honor. And the coquette, this figure of fascination, is a symptom of all the problems that fascinate Kant. His desire to understand her is of a piece with his questions about honor and living in the opinions of others. As Girard notes,

> We have no difficulty in recognizing in all this [the phenomenon of the coquette] the mirage produced by the model and obstacle when it resists our imitation; it is the metaphysical ghost that is invariably conjured up—manifested by the model and obstacle—for the benefit of a desire that becomes increasingly fascinated by it, since desire always returns to bump and bruise itself against it.[6]

Thus, Kant was deeply concerned with mimetic phenomena in his pre-critical period. Rousseau led Kant to regard all human beings as not only equally worthy of respect but also as being equally capable of moral reflection. At the same time, Rousseau also made Kant aware of the noxious influence of the desire for the esteem of others or *amour-propre*. These two facts are not unrelated. The greater the equality that humans realize in their social relations, the more extensive and pervasive becomes the contest for esteem. Kant is concerned here with what Girard has termed mimetic desire, or desires that exist because they are imitated from those around us.

As I said, the *Remarks* are Kant's private musings, and I do not think that one should try to build an argument on them. Still, they serve the purpose of orienting our interpretation of what he did publish by reading them in the light of the concerns revealed in the *Remarks*. The concerns are by and large mimetic ones. With this hermeneutical aid we can turn to the next part of our story: Kant's publication of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by the Dreams of Metaphysics* (1766).

We find reverberations in *Dreams* of each of the points I highlighted above—Kant's personal conversion away from holding the common person in contempt, his tendency to look at both sides of a problem, and his concern with the influence of the other, especially the coquette. The first shows itself in a most unexpected way. The result of Kant's new freedom from contempt of the masses is an interest in ghost stories and tales of the supernatural that fascinate everyone, including Kant. He uses Emmanuel Swedenborg's writings as an example. Kant knew from his former position that "the people" could be gullible and foolish. When he lost his contempt for them, he also saw how foolish and gullible intellectuals could be. How much they too are caught up in fashions and in fads.

> For it has always been the case and will, I suppose, continue to be so in the future, that certain absurdities have found acceptance even among rational people, and that for no other reason than that they are the object of general discussion. Among such absurdities are to be found, to name but a few, faith-healing, water-divining, premonitions, the operation of the imagination of pregnant women, the influence exercised by the phases of the moon on animals and plants. Was it not, indeed, recently that common country folk thoroughly avenged themselves on the learned for the mockery with which the latter tended to treat them for their credulity? For by a great deal of hearsay children and women eventually induced a substantial number of intelligent men to take a common wolf for a hyaena, and in spite of the fact that any sensible person could see that there are not like to be any African predators prowling around the forests of France.[7]

We see here not just the usual "urban legends" that people tend to buy into, but also how things find acceptance "for no other reason than that they are object of general discussion," in other words, through mimetic influence. Kant also reveals the way in which rivalry and resentment between intellectuals and others lead to delusions as well as vengeance.

Second, the whole of *Dreams* is set up around looking at both sides of the question. For example, the second chapter is titled: "A Fragment of Occult Philosophy, the Purpose of which is to Reveal Our Community with the Spirit-World," while the third chapter bears the title: "Anti-Cabbala—A

Fragment of Ordinary Philosophy, the Purpose of which is to Cancel Community with the Spirit-World." This is only one obvious example of the way that Kant is deliberately playing both sides of the argument. This is not yet the problem of the antinomy of pure reason, but it is a similar way of thinking through a problem and explains the confused reaction to *Dreams*. Kant was so convincing in thinking through both sides that readers did not know which side Kant was on.

Third, Kant is concerned with the drive for honor in *Dreams* and devotes a "detour" to its consideration. While he refuses to "linger over the drive, which makes us so heavily and universally dependent on the judgement of others, and causes us to regard the approval or applause of others as so necessary to perfecting our own good opinion of ourselves, though this tendency sometimes gives rise to a wrong-headed and misguided conception of honour," he does make it known that he is concerned about it.[8] His hope, at this point, is to see the drive to honor as also pointing toward a different kind of dependency, a good dependency "on the *universal human understanding*" such that may provide the "means of conferring a kind of unity of reason on the totality of thinking beings."[9] The very thing that seems to be causing the problem may in fact be a means of salvation.

Finally, in *Dreams*, we see the result of Kant's efforts to understand the figure of the coquette. For in this writing metaphysics is characterized as a coquette. Kant gives one of those rare autobiographical asides and exclaims: "Metaphysics, with which, as fate would have it, I have fallen in love but from which I can boast only a few favors, offers two kinds of advantage."[10] The first advantage is that metaphysics "can solve the problems thrown up by the enquiring mind, when it uses reason spy after the more hidden properties of things."[11] But we are mistaken if we read this as a straightforward advantage. Kant goes on to admit that "hope here is all too often disappointed by the outcome. And, on this occasion, too, satisfaction has escaped our eager grasp."[12] The advantage that metaphysics offers here is that it attracts, it fascinates, but it does not satisfy. In so doing, it leads us to the second advantage, "the least known and most important."[13] After long experience, one realizes that metaphysics is "a science of the *limits of human reason*."[14] Thus, for Kant in 1766, metaphysics as the fascinating coquette is not separate from metaphysics as a science of the

limits of human reason. In other words, the kind of mimetic themes that Kant is pursuing are leading him in the direction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

As a statement of Kant's position, *Dreams* was not a success. The most common reaction to this writing, both then and now, is confusion. What exactly is Kant trying to say? Ernst Cassirer sees the work as full of humor and yet with an unmistakably "serious vein" running through it. He then poses a series of questions:

> But in this paradoxical mixture of jest and earnestness, which was the decisive factor? Which was the author's true face and which the mask he had assumed? Was the book just a passing by-blow of free humor, or was there concealed behind this satyr play of the mind something resembling a tragedy of metaphysics? None of Kant's friends and critics was ever able to answer this question with certainty.[15]

Looking at all this from a mimetic perspective, we can see that the very language Cassirer is moved to employ, such words as "satyr play" and "tragedy," tells us something of what is being intuited. *Dreams* may not have been clear, but it was provocative; it was scandalous. Kant himself gives us further evidence as to the nature of the provocation. In a letter to Mendelssohn defending *Dreams*, Kant is quite explicit about what it meant to accomplish. He writes:

> My suggested treatment will serve a merely negative purpose, the avoidance of stupidity (*stultitia caruisse*), but it will prepare the way for a positive one. Although the innocence of a healthy but uninstructed understanding requires only an *organon* in order to arrive at insight, a *catarcticon* is needed to get rid of the pseudo-insight of a spoiled head.[16]

The reference to *catarcticon* (a cathartic) is followed by Kant's denunciation of metaphysics as it is practiced in Germany at this time. Kant confesses not just a repugnance but even a "certain hatred" of what is being passed off as insight.[17] He concludes that we would be better off with "total extermination" of these insights, since that would be less harmful than their "confounded contagion [*verwünschten Fruchtbarkeit*]."[18]

Kant's Philosophy of History

Kant did not lose interest in mimetic phenomena during his so-called "silent decade" (from the publication of his dissertation in 1771 until the *Critique of Pure Reason* was published in 1781). It emerges quite prominently once again in Kant's writings on the philosophy of history—e.g., *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* and *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*. Unsurprisingly, Rousseau is explicitly mentioned and frequently alluded to in these writings. Rousseau allows Kant to account for conflict as part of a larger plan by formulating a law that explicates the relationship between sociable and conflictual relationships. While this law is implied in both the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* and the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, it reaches a very clear formulation in Rousseau's "Preface to *Narcissus*," published in January or February of 1753. The "Preface" is part of the Controversy, the back and forth between Rousseau and his critics following the publication of the *First Discourse* and lasting up to the publication of the *Second Discourse*. I quote at length:

> There is more; and of all the truths I have proposed for the consideration of the wise, this is the most surprising and the most cruel. Our Writers all regard as the masterpiece of the politics of our century the sciences, arts, luxury, commerce, laws, and the other ties which, by tightening among men the ties of society from personal interest, put them all in mutual dependence, give them reciprocal needs, and common interests, and oblige each of them to cooperate for the happiness of the others in order to be able to attain his own. Doubtless these ideas are fine, and are presented in a favorable light. But in examining them attentively and impartially, one finds much that should be taken with a grain of salt in the advantages that they seem to present at first.
>
> Thus it is a very marvelous thing to have made it impossible for men to live among themselves without being prejudiced against, supplanting, deceiving, betraying, mutually destroying each other! Henceforth we must bear of letting ourselves be seen as we are: for two men whose interests agree, a hundred thousand can be opposed to them, and there is in this case no other means to succeed than to deceive or ruin all these people. This is the deadly source of violence, treachery, perfidy, and all the horrors necessarily demanded by a state of things in which each—pretending to work for the fortune and reputation of the others—seeks only to raise his own above them and at their expense.[19]

The challenge that Kant took up was to show how this law, which leads to such disorder, is also capable of producing order.

Kant takes up and transforms Rousseau in the "Fourth Proposition" of his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* in which he states: "The means nature employs in order to bring about the development of all its predispositions is their *antagonism* in society, insofar as the latter is in the end the cause of their lawful order."[20] Kant calls this "antagonism"

the "*unsociable sociability* of human beings."[21] Rousseau formulated the law by which society sets human beings against each other precisely to the degree that it makes humans dependent upon each other, that is, puts them in a double bind. Kant accepts this but sees it as "the cause of their [predispositions to] lawful order."[22] Disorder produces order. In a certain analogy with the physical forces of attraction and repulsion, Kant sees human nature as having an "inclination to become socialized" and also having a "great propensity to *individualize* (isolate) himself."[23]

The first tendency is rooted in the feeling that the human is developing his natural predispositions, the latter in "the unsociable property of willing to direct everything so as to get his own way, and hence expects resistance everywhere because he knows of himself that he is inclined on his side toward resistance against others."[24] This resistance to let others have everything their own way "awakens all the powers of the human being, brings him to overcome his propensity to indolence, and, driven by ambition, tyranny, and greed, [*durch Ehrsucht, Herrschsucht oder Habsucht*] to obtain for himself a rank among his fellows, whom he cannot *stand*, but also cannot leave *alone*."[25] The themes of a drive for honor, of competition that were present in *Remarks* from the mid-1760s return here even though the critical problem of how we know has, at least to a great extent, been resolved.

Thus, the scandal of living with others whom one hates and yet cannot do without, operates as the dynamism that moves the whole social system. It is the motive of all progress. For Kant, this all is part of a large historical process that begins with "pathologically compelled agreement" but is moving toward the formation a society that will be "a *moral* whole."[26] Humans are forced to face their "self pretensions" so that their talents may unfold. "The human being wills concord; but nature knows better what is good for his species: it wills discord."[27] This allows Kant to be grateful and to expect others to be grateful "to nature for their spiteful competitive vanity, for their insatiable desire to possess and even to dominate!"[28]

Kant had his own famous experience of being awakened from slumber by Hume, which led to the breakthrough of critical philosophy. In a sense, he generalizes this experience in saying that there is no development without the disruption of our tendency toward indolence or slumber. And thus all of these seemingly dreadful phenomena "betray the hand of a wise

creator; and not an evil spirit who might have bungled his splendid undertaking or ruined it in an envious manner."[29] There is then, and we shall see this more explicitly expressed in other texts that relate to the philosophy of history, no such thing as original sin. To raise the question—What is the relationship between the hereditary fault [*Erbfehler*] in Kant's metaphysics, of the delusion of reason, and this unsociable sociability?—is to ask whether critical philosophy makes one less prone to the antagonism. Not at all. Just as the illusion can never be done away with, so critical philosophy cannot save one from "spiteful competitive vanity" or an "insatiable desire to possess" or even "to dominate." What it changes is one's attitude toward it. One is now grateful to a "wise creator" rather than seeing reality as something that has been ruined "in an envious manner."

Kant follows Rousseau in his clear-sighted vision of the terrible effects of *amour-propre*. They appear to part ways in that Kant sees a kind of natural process by which these terrible effects become advantageous and develop the rational predispositions of the species. But Kant remains under Rousseau's influence insofar as Kant is unwilling to label the progress that does result from the antagonism, "moral." Rather it is a certain cultivation of the species that is leading to its being civilized but not yet moralized. Moralization can only occur in a religious context.

Given all this, the "greatest problem for the human species, to which nature compels him, is the achievement of a civil society universally administering right."[30] Human freedom implies human conflict and if humans can devise the "most precise determination and security of the boundaries of this freedom so that the latter can coexist with the freedom of others," then one will have a system in which freedom is combined with "the greatest degree of irresistible force" of the law and humans will flourish.[31]

Students of mimetic theory are aware that there is a process of bringing about a new order out of the chaos of the deteriorating old order—the scapegoat mechanism. It is generative, and it is, to some extent, efficient. All of the conflict and antagonism in the community gets aimed at one person, or a small group, such as a single family, and the situation changes from a "quasi" war of all against all to a sacrifice of all against one. The sacrificial structure, the distinction or difference between "us" and the "victim" is the first difference that grounds all the rest. Now this is real physical violence that creates order. Reason is formed or informed by it.

Thus, there develop structures of thought that are more or less modelled on the sacrificial process. I think that this distinction between the event and the subsequent rational structures is important because we need to keep the distinction between actual physical violence and other forms that mimic it, while drawing a connection between them. So, there is a real analogy between the community killing the person that they have come to blame for their misfortunes and me with my group of friends trashing someone among ourselves as a way of building up internal cohesion. Perhaps it is what the Gospel is suggesting when Jesus says that Law states, "Thou shalt not kill," but he says everyone who calls his brother or sister a "fool" will end up in Gehenna. Everyone hating the same person or thing is one way to create a kind of community.

For Kant, on the other hand, the alchemy that transforms disorder into order is modelled on natural processes. "All culture and art that adorn humanity, and the most beautiful social order, are the fruits of unsociability, through which it is necessitated by itself to discipline itself, and so by an art extorted from it, to develop completely the germs of nature."[32] Some of this way of thinking can be traced backed to Rousseau. He taught Kant that the sciences and the arts do not have

> an origin corresponding to the idea we like to have of it. Astronomy was born from superstition; Eloquence from ambition, hate, flattery, and falsehood; Geometry from avarice; Physics from vain curiosity; all, even Moral philosophy from human pride. Thus the Sciences and Arts owe their birth to our vices.[33]

Rousseau never condemns the sciences and the arts in themselves. He admires and praises people like Descartes and Newton, whom he calls "Preceptors of the human race."[34] Nevertheless, he argues for a strict correlation between the advancement of culture and the depravity of the human race.[35] Kant is trying to take Rousseau's argument a step further and show that, while all that is true, there is also a longer and deeper progress occurring.

Thus, the progress seems to be a process that develops what nature has given to humans. Kant compares it with the way trees grow in a forest. Each competes against each other for air and sun and thus they force each other to grow upward, straight and true. Human beings inflict upon each other a "condition of coercion," because their inclinations make it such that

they "can not long subsist next to one another in wild freedom."[36] The "art" by which conflict becomes order is itself "extorted" from humanity. Aside from these hints taken from natural, not social, processes, Kant does not tell us how conflict itself produces the order.

The Critical Solution

In 1766, in his letter to Mendelssohn, Kant stated that human reason needed a "cathartic." This word, "*Katarktikon*" in the original, provides not only a link between what Kant had hoped to accomplish in *Dreams* and what he claims he does, in fact, provide in the *Critique of Pure Reason* but also a connection with Girard's thought. In the *First Critique*, Kant claims that with his method "one can exempt oneself from a great deal of dogmatic rubbish, and put in its place a sober critique, which, as a true cathartic [*als ein wahres Katarktikon*], will happily purge such delusions along with the punditry [*Vielwisserei*] attendant on them."[37]

This use of "cathartic" to characterize critical philosophy ties it to many themes of Girard's mimetic theory. *Katharsis* is being used by Kant as a medical term. Girard explains how the medical meaning brings with it a religious meaning as well: "A cathartic medicine is a powerful drug that induces the evacuation of humors or other substances judged to be noxious. The illness and its cure are often seen as one. . . . The crisis is provoked by a supplementary dosage of the affliction resulting in the expulsion of the pathogenic agents along with itself. The operation is the same as that of the human *katharma*, although in medicine the act of purgation is not mythic but real."[38] But there is an older, religious meaning; *katharma* is "the Greek term for an evil object extracted by means of a . . . ritual" that expels the object that supposedly caused the illness from the body of the patient. Further, "the word katharsis refers primarily to the mysterious benefits that accrue to the community upon the death of a human *katharma* or *pharmakos*."[39] As Girard tells the story:

> Once upon a time a temple and an altar on which the victim was sacrificed were substituted for the original act of collective violence; now there is an amphitheater and a stage on which the fate of the *katharma*, played out by an actor, will purge the spectators of their passions and provoke a new katharsis, both individual and collective. This katharsis will restore the health and well-being of the community.[40]

For Kant's critical theory to play the role of orchestrating the *katharma* in the modern world, it is no more necessary for him to have had the religious implications of it in mind than it was for Aristotle. Girard's words about Aristotle can be applied to Kant: "Yet in order for the term *katharsis* to assume a sacrificial character in the *Poetics* it was not necessary for Aristotle to be aware of the original operation. Indeed, his ignorance of that operation was almost a requirement."[41] For the *Critique of Pure Reason* to function as an ersatz ritual, something analogous to a "sacrificial killing had to be concealed" in the philosophic use of *katharsis*.[42]

To understand something of what is concealed in the *First Critique*, we turn to a letter Kant wrote toward the end of his life. It is addressed to his erstwhile student, Christian Garve, and in it Kant thanks him for a book that he had sent to him. The book was a history of ethics that treated Kant's thought on the subject. But in it, Kant found a footnote that he felt he had to protest. He writes:

> It was not the investigation of the existence of God, immortality, and so on, but rather the antinomy of pure reason—"The world has a beginning; it has no beginning, and so on, right up to the 4th [*sic*]: There is freedom in man, vs. There is no freedom, only the necessity of nature"—that is what first aroused me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself, in order to resolve the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself.[43]

Historical research indicates that only in the light of the critical solution was Kant able to clearly articulate the problem of the antinomy.[44] Nevertheless, from a retrospective glance, Kant could say that what was moving him from the beginning was a drive to "resolve the scandal."

Our attention is drawn to the use of the word "scandal" as being the driving force behind Kant's theorizing. The influence of Rousseau not only was an influence on problems or issues that Kant considered but also affected the way in which Kant philosophized. One philosophizes because one has been scandalized, and one can only philosophize from that position. For Kant, developing a critical metaphysics involved setting the reader right, in the way that he had been set right by Rousseau. For Kant himself, this had meant being drawn into a dynamic of attraction and repulsion with Rousseau's writings, and from that struggle finding his place. This dynamism of attraction and repulsion is best understood in terms of mimetic

theory, in particular the notion of "scandal" as that which both attracts and repels, "excites without satisfying, seduces without delivering, and promises without fulfilling"—the behavior of a coquette.[45] In effect, scandal is a term for the danger of getting lost in a labyrinth of thought that never reaches a clear conclusion, but it is also the term for the situation that prods one into looking for a way out.

Kant grasped this from his reading of Rousseau and tried to imitate him. We see him thinking about scandalous reality in his *Remarks*. We read him trying clumsily in *Dreams* to bring about the effect in the reader that Rousseau had on him. He succeeded not so much in scandalizing others as in confusing them. But being Kant, he did not give up. We can read the preface of both the A and B editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as trying to open up the same theoretical space of scandal as Kant had found in Rousseau.[46] The opening sentence of the preface to the first edition has it all in nuce: "Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason."[47] By reason, we are fated to be attracted to questions that repel us with unanswerability. We are kept at bay by what most deeply attracts us.

The testimony of Kant's letter to Garve encourages us to turn to the "Antinomy of Pure Reason" section of the *First Critique* to see what Kant means by scandal and to see how it operates there. Kant points to the "Antinomy of Pure Reason" as what awoke him and urged him toward his critical philosophy. The antinomies are four pairs of theses and antitheses printed on facing pages. Each set has the same structure: a thesis and an antithesis, then a proof of each, followed by a section of remarks, which is divided into one remark on the thesis and one the antithesis. According to Kant, there are four—and only four—cosmological questions that compose the antimony. The first is the question of whether the world has a boundary in either space or time. The second is whether the world is made up of simple elements or elements that are infinitely divisible. The third asks whether there exists a causality of freedom in the world or whether everything is mechanically determined. The fourth asks whether there is a necessary being in the world.

For the purposes of this investigation, we are going to grant Kant his point that both the theses and the antitheses are proved by valid arguments.

Rather than examining each proof, I want to take a step back and look at the phenomenon that Kant is describing in this section of the *First Critique*. The antinomy of pure reason comes from our attempt to think about the absolute unity of the series of conditions of appearance or to think about the world as a whole, as a cosmos. Thus, Kant calls these cosmological questions.

What is unique to the antinomy is its two-sidedness. Kant writes that here a "new phenomenon of human reason shows itself."[48] It is a "natural Antithetic" or seeming contradiction of two propositions that are both logically valid and yet contradict each other. This antithetic not only helps to "guard reason against . . . slumber" but also brings it "into . . . temptation."[49] The temptation is, naturally, double: reason can be tempted to either "a skeptical hopelessness," on the one side, or to a "dogmatic stubbornness," on the other.[50] Either way leads to the death of philosophy but Kant reckons that hopelessness "might also be called the *euthanasia* of pure reason."[51]

The antinomy is caused by reason's search for absolute totality, its drive for unity. Reason seeks to form things into one, but, in so doing, it sows discord. Notice here that reason is characterized as desiring. We naturally want to ask whence comes this desire for unity. Kant is not clear, but in general his answer is that this simply is the nature of reason—it seeks the unconditioned. On the other hand, the "story" Kant tells in this section is purely mimetic, which opens up the possibility that the unconditioned is not something preexisting that reason seeks, rather it is the *result* of mimetic rivalry. As Girard writes:

> Transcendence *is*, in short, only because it serves as a deceiving object of rivalry. The symbolic order is passed off as being invulnerable to all the conflicts involving it, as being absolutely out of range. In reality, what we now observe is the result of this rivalry, a state of extreme ruin, a competitive action really destructive, but the structuralist does not foresee that destruction.

And

> Desiring mimesis precedes the appearance of its object and survives, as we shall see, the disappearance of every object. In the end this desiring mimesis engenders its objects. . . . The object always comes to the foreground and mimesis is hidden behind it, even in the eyes of the desiring subjects. The convergence of desire defines the object. It is truly impossible to

> fix the origin of and the responsibility for the rivalry, whose inexhaustible source is mimesis. Mimesis cannot spread without becoming reciprocal.[52]

Let's look at the mimetic rivalry that Kant describes. He writes that when we "venture also to extend these [the understanding's] principles beyond the boundaries of experience," the result will be entering into the realm of "*sophistical* theorems."[53] Now these theorems are impossible in the sense that they "may neither hope for confirmation in experience nor fear refutation by it."[54] But once one of these theorems appears, it also "meets with conditions of its necessity in the nature of reason itself."[55] That is, the antinomy of pure reason is the conjunction of impossibility and necessity that characterizes the scandalous. Kant adds that, naturally, what is true of the one form of the antinomy, the thesis, is equally true of its "opposite," the antithesis.[56]

Kant gives clearer indications that the antinomy of pure reason is a rational process that is analogous to mimetic rivalry in the second section, titled "Antithetic of Pure Reason." The antithetic is conflictual; it is necessary, and it is double. The proposition that constitutes the antinomy is not arbitrary but "one that every human reason must necessarily come up against in the course of its progress," and, again crucially, this is not simply true of the single proposition but equally true of "its opposite."[57] That is, the antinomy produces from the start what Girard may have called "enemy twins"—two opposing propositions, both of which find in reason the "conditions of its necessity."[58] If we ask what precisely are the conditions of the thesis's necessity, I think we must answer that at least one of the conditions for the thesis to exist, precisely as thesis, is the existence of its antithesis. In other words, a proposition does not qualify as a thesis of transcendental cosmology without its accompanying proof, and the proof of each proposition is apagogical, a proof that depends upon negating the antithesis. Thus, the thesis and antithesis are constitutive parts of one another. One cannot prove that "the world has a beginning in time" without at the same assuming that "the world is eternal," if only to deny it. The denial of the antithesis forms the existence of the thesis.

These opposing principles

> open up a dialectical battlefield, where each part will keep the upper hand as long as it is allowed to attack, and will certainly defeat that which is compelled to conduct itself merely defensively. Hence, hardy knights, whether they support the good or the bad cause, are

> certain of carrying away the laurels of victory if only they take care to have the prerogative of making the last attack, and are not bound to resist a new assault from the opponent. One can easily imagine that from time immemorial this arena has often been entered, both sides gaining many victories, but that each time the final victory was decisive merely because care was taken that the champion of the good cause held the field alone, his opponent having been forbidden to take up his weapon again.[59]

Girard expresses something resembling Kant's vision.

> Desire is linked to mimetic violence, that is, to an exchange of reprisals that can indeed be invisible, *underground*, as Dostoevsky would say, or even imaginary in its modalities, but nonetheless is real in its basic principle. He who has struck the last blow rises above the other. He conserves the mythic prize as long as he can believe his triumph is definitive, as long as his adversary does not steal it back; in short, as long as he is not the object of a new reprisal. Dostoevskian doubles live in a universe already resembling our own, peopled by bureaucrats and intellectuals, a universe intensely and arbitrarily competitive, almost totally devoid of clear-cut elements, of objective signs of triumph or failure such as physical violence or the rules of sports.[60]

The starting point, as mentioned above, is reason's desire for unity. In trying to achieve that unity, it ends up giving birth to discord and not just any kind of discord but a rivalry. The violence ends when one of the parties is victorious and the other is expelled. But the other always returns, and through the reciprocity of the violence, they become more and more alike.

On one level the cause of the antinomy is logical. But Kant also analyses the interest of reason in this conflict. First, he tells the reader that he has deliberately and appropriately shorn the rival assertions of the antinomy of their "full splendour" and has instead used dry formulae in place of the "glittering pretensions of reason."[61] Nevertheless, "if it [philosophy] could only assert its pretensions, it would leave every other human science far behind in value, since it would promise to ground our greatest expectations and prospects concerning the ultimate ends in which all reason's efforts must finally unite."[62] That is, the questions that make up the fourfold antinomy of pure reason are such that for their

> solution the mathematician would gladly give up his entire science. . . . Even the proper dignity of mathematics (that pride of human reason) rests on the fact that since in the great as well as the small, in its order and regularity, and in the admirable unity of the forces moving nature, mathematics guides reason's insight into nature far beyond every expectation of any philosophy built on common experience, it gives occasion and encouragement even to the use of reason which extends beyond all experience, just as it provides to the philosophy

> concerned with nature the most excellent materials for supporting its inquiries, as far as their character allows, with appropriate intuitions.[63]

That is, mathematics and philosophy are in a kind of rivalry with each other. Philosophy has the better, more important questions, but mathematics provides a better model of how to go beyond common experience. Our interest as philosophers in these questions, then, is not pure, for with them we could beat the mathematicians at their own game.

But, precisely at the moment when reason entertains the "greatest expectations" of itself, it finds itself instead "entangled in a crowd of arguments and counterarguments" from which it cannot turn away nor pretend that it is all somehow a form of "mere shadow boxing."[64] Reason remains attached to these arguments "on account either of its honour or even of its security."[65] The interest here is mimetic. Philosophy is concerned with its honor. Thus, reason has to look to the origin of this disunity with itself.

Kant, however, does not pursue this inquiry after the origin immediately; instead he interrupts his argument to look at which side we would take in the arguments, if we were forced to take a side. We leave aside the "criterion of truth" and turn instead to our "interest."[66] Kant does this so that the reader might understand "why the participants in this dispute have sooner taken one side than the other, even if no superior insight into the object has been the cause of it, and it likewise explains still other ancillary things, e.g., the zealous heat of the one side and the cold assurance of the other, why they hail the one party with joyful approval and are irreconcilably prejudiced against the other."[67] Again, Kant is explaining the role our "interests" play in making the antinomy mimetic.

Why do we care about the reasons why people take sides, if we, as critical philosophers, know that either both are wrong or both could be right, depending on the viewpoint? Kant teaches us something about ourselves, about the way that we see the other side as different—one side characterized as hot, the other as cold—but we are actually identical—each side applauding its own, while booing the other.

Kant calls those who favor the theses "dogmatists," and those who favor the antitheses "empiricists." The dogmatists find the practical advantage that metaphysics, conceived in their way, provides support to both morality and religion. The speculative advantage lies in being able to deduce the

unconditional from the conditions. In addition, Kant calls attention to its popularity, and this popularity itself "certainly constitutes no small part of what recommends it."[68] There are other factors, but the fact remains that simply because many people think this way, many more people will also think this way—i.e., it is mimetic.

Over against this popularity, empiricism has a different form of mimesis on its side—seduction. The advantages it offers to our speculative interests "are very attractive and far surpass any that the dogmatic teacher of the ideas of reason might promise."[69] In the end, though, empiricism itself becomes its other; it becomes dogmatic "and boldly denies whatever lies beyond the sphere of its intuitive cognitions" and thereby makes the mirror-image mistake of dogmatism. Dogmatism claims to extend knowledge beyond the limits of experience; empiricism, on the other hand, makes the *dogmatic* claim that what lies beyond experience does not exist, thus claiming to know more than it can.[70] The two parties become more and more alike.

Still, the final reason that the dogmatic is more popular is the most telling for us. Kant tells us that it is "exceedingly strange that empiricism is completely contrary to everything popular, although one might have thought that the common understanding would eagerly take up a proposal to satisfy it through nothing but cognitions of experience and their rational connection, in place of transcendental dogmatism, which compels it to ascend to concepts far surpassing the insight and rational faculties even of those minds most practised in thinking."[71] It turns out that this is just the reason why it is popular. By adopting the dogmatic side, everyone is equal, since each is equally ignorant of the truth. "For then it [the dogmatic position] finds itself in a state in which even the most learned can take nothing away from it."[72] One can "ratiocinate" about these positions, "because it is wandering among mere ideas, about which one can be at one's most eloquent just because one *knows nothing about them*."[73] At root, it is the rivalry between the learned and the "people," taken together with the possibility of enjoying the illusion that one has insight, that makes the dogmatic position popular.[74]

A final interest or reason why dogmatism always is more popular is that reason is architectonic, i.e., it wants unity in and among its cognitions and hence only allows those principles "as at least do not render an intended

cognition incapable of standing together with others in some system or other."[75] The propositions on the side of the antithesis "render the completion of an edifice of cognitions entirely impossible."[76] They do not allow for a starting point that could serve as "the foundation for its building, a completed edifice of cognitions."[77] Reason is looking for a foundation that will allow for a complete unity. According to empiricism, "beyond every state of the world there is another still older one."[78]

If humans "could renounce all interests, and, indifferent to all consequences, consider the assertions of reason according to their grounds, then they would have no way of escaping the dilemma."[79] Each person would be in a state of "ceaseless vacillation."[80] Kant compares this state of ceaseless vacillation to being in a dream. There, phantom images or doubles appear. These are metaphysical ghosts, the ghosts he has been battling since at least the 1760s.

For Kant there is a way forward. First, negatively, one should "withdraw entirely from all partiality."[81] Second, positively, one should publicly communicate "his remarks to others for their judgment."[82] Here we find again, Kant's imagery of both contest and court. Kant wants "the propositions and counter-propositions, terrorized by no threats, come forward to defend themselves from before a jury drawn from their own estate (namely the estate of fallible human beings)."[83]

To follow Kant, the reason why he wants these propositions and counter-propositions to come forward is because they will raise problems that reason ought to be able to solve. For Kant, "there are sciences whose nature entails that every question occurring in them must absolutely be answerable from what one knows, because the answer must arise from the same source as the question; and there is no way allowed to plead unavoidable ignorance, but rather a solution can be demanded."[84]

Kant returns here to the theme of the "skeptical way of treating the questions that pure reason puts to pure reason."[85] I want to emphasize that I think Kant's hope here is that the reader will have gone through an experience of attraction and repulsion, an experience of fascination, of scandal at the fact that there is an antinomy of pure reason and that now, through his skeptical method, he hopes that he can put us in a place where we would gladly refrain from demanding to see our questions answered dogmatically. If I, the reader, could

> antecedently see about a cosmological idea that whatever side of the unconditioned in the regressive synthesis of appearances it might come down on, it would *be* either *too big* or *too small* for every *concept of the understanding*, then I would comprehend that since it has to do with an object of experience, which should conform to a possible concept of the understanding, this idea must be entirely empty and without significance because the object does not fit it no matter how I may accommodate the one to the other.[86]

One feels like saying to Kant what Girard wrote: "If desire were wise, it would not be desire."[87] For Kant, the ideas of reason exist apart from all human relations; for Girard, Kantian ideas are the result of mimetic rivalry that goes to extremes. Every appearance of "incongruence" is a sign of violence that needs to be investigated to see the mimetic conflict and rivalry that underlies it. Kant holds that all world-concepts are both too big and too small, so that, as long as reason holds to them, it is involved in an unavoidable antinomy. Girard clarifies this by explaining that, insofar as "antinomy" implies rivalry, the antinomy precedes and grounds the world-concept, not the other way around.

The antinomy of the pure reason, the idea of a world-whole, is an idea of "doubtful signification" in that it implies both too much and too little. "In all these cases, we have said the *world-idea* is either too big for the empirical regress, hence for every possible concept of the understanding, or else too small for it."[88] In this way the antinomy of pure reason joins such phenomena as twins, contagions, the monstrous, and the bizarre, in that all of them point to the mimetic rivalry that lies, usually hidden, beneath them. We have to pay attention to the antinomy, because they are a structure of our reason that traps our reason in a structure. I believe that Kant, although he obviously would not put it this way, is trying to grasp a crisis of undifferentiation—dogmatists and empiricists gradually take over each other's position. For him, it is bizarre that reason comes up with an idea—the world-idea—that leads to irrationality. What Girard helps us to see is that one should not try to overcome the irrationality by applying the same rationality that produced it. Kant shows us one way of radically attacking the rivalry is to insist that we drop these cosmological questions in favor of questions of experience that are inherently accessible to all. As Pourciau remarks, "therefore there is no such thing as an empirical vision that remains in principle unavailable to the less spiritually privileged masses."[89]

Kant is trying to realize theoretical implications of the conversion he experienced reading Rousseau.

To conclude, I want to simply suggest a further line of investigation that needs to be pursued. Kant implies that the ideas that make up the antinomy have a certain internal dynamism. First, they are transcendent rather than transcendental, and, as such, they incite the transgressive behavior of the tearing up of boundary markers between that which we can know and that which is beyond our ken. This leads us to a land that recognizes no demarcations at all. This is disorder, chaos, and violence. But by their very nature, they lead us still further, to the positing of a necessary being—a god. A student of Girard senses here the movement of the primitive sacred, and this needs to be explained.

NOTES

1. Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, trans. Patrick R. Frierson and Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 96. I have omitted words that were crossed out by Kant, although they are present in printed text and in the translation as well. See also a related passage: "The opinion of inequality also makes human beings unequal. Only the doctrine of Mr. *Rousseau* can bring it about that even the most learned philosopher, with his knowledge, earnestly regards himself, without help from religion, as no better than the common man" (ibid., 188). I will be giving references to the English translations of Kant's writings except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which will be referred to in the standard manner of A and/or B for the first and second edition, followed by the page number.

2. For a more detailed description of the change in Kant's character around the age of forty, see Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), especially chapter 4, "A Palingenesis and Its Consequences (1764–1769)."

3. Kant writes: "The only naturally necessary good of a human being in relation to the will of others is equality (freedom) and, with respect to the whole, unity. Analogy: Repulsion, through which the body fills its own space just as everyone [fills] his own. Attraction, through which all parts combine into one." See *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, 180).

4. Ibid., 102.

5. Ibid., 194.

6. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 375.

7. Kant, *Observations*, 343.

8. Ibid., 321.

9. Ibid., 322.

10. Ibid., 354.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 78–79.

16. Immanuel Kant and Arnulf Zweig, *Correspondence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 91.

17. Ibid., 90.

18. Ibid.

19. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (*Second Discourse*)*; Polemics; and, Political Economy*, trans. Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, vol. 3, *The Collected Writings of Rosseau* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992), 193. The shortest statement of this law is: "Our needs bring us together in proportion as our passions divide us, and the more we become enemies of our fellow men, the less we can do without them" (3:282; 4:76). Unfortunately, this is from the *Geneva Manuscript* of the *Social Contract*, and Kant could not have read it. For a discussion of this passage, consult Grace G. Roosevelt, *Reading Rousseau in the Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 76.

20. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 111.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 112.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid. (translation modified).

32. Ibid., 113.

33. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (*First Discourse*)*; and, Polemics*, trans. Roger D. Masters, Christopher Kelly, Judith R. Bush, vol. 2, *The Collected Writings of Rosseau* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), 12.

34. Ibid., 21.

35. See ibid., 7.

36. Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, 112.

37. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A 486/B 514.

38. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 287–88.

39. Ibid., 287.

40. Ibid., 290.

41. Ibid., 291.

42. Ibid.

43. Kant and Zweig, *Correspondence*, 552.

44. See Norbert Hinske, "Kants Begriff Der Antinomie Und Die Etappen Seiner Ausarbeitung," *Kant-Studien* 56/3–4 (1965): 485–96.

45. Jeremiah Alberg, "The Scandal of Origins in Rousseau," *Contagion* 11 (2004): 2.

46. See the opening chapter of Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

47. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

48. Ibid., A 407/B 433.

49. Ibid., A 407/B 434.

50. Ibid., A 407/B 434.

51. Ibid., A 407/B 434.

52. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 111 and 91, respectively.

53. Kant *Critique of Pure Reason.*

54. Ibid., A 421/B 449.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid., A 422/B449.

58. For the first quotation, see René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 159, and for the second Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 421/B 449.

59. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 422–23/B450–51.

60. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 94.

61. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 462–63/B 490–91.

62. Ibid., A 463/B 491.

63. Ibid., A 464/B 492.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., A 465/B 493.

67. Ibid. The translators of the Cambridge edition insert a footnote here to say that the word "they" or, in German, *sie*, has "no plausible nearby referent" (497, footnote f). I think that Kant is writing one side does this and the other side does that, but both sides resemble each other in hailing their own party and being prejudiced against the other.

68. Ibid., A 467/B 495.

69. Ibid., A 468/B 496.

70. See ibid., A 471/B 499.

71. Ibid., A 472/B 500.

72. Ibid., A 473/B 501.

73. Ibid., A 473/B 502.

74. Kant had already seen the influence of rivalry on the popularity of ghost stories in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. See Jeremiah Alberg, "What Dreams May Come: Kant's *Träume Eines Geistersehers*

Elucidated by the Dreams of a Coquette," *Kant-Studien* 106, no. 2 (2015): 169–200.

75. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 474/B 502.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid., A 475/B 503.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., A 475–6/B 503–4.

84. Ibid., A 476/B 504.

85. Ibid., A 486/B 514; see also A 423–24/B 451.

86. Ibid., A 486/B 514.

87. René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 133.

88. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 489/B 517.

89. Sarah Pourciau, "Disarming the Double: Kant in Defense of Philosophy (1766)," *Germanic Review* 8, no. 1/2 (2006): 99–120, quotation 117.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Andreas Wilmes

ONE CANNOT SEPARATE GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770–1831) from history. His philosophical oeuvre belongs to a time when German culture, both through the Enlightenment and Romanticism, reached its peak. It was also a time during which Europe dramatically changed through industrialization and the political aftermath of the French Revolution. In 1806, while revising the first manuscript of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*,[1] Hegel saw Jena occupied by the Napoleonic armies. Several years after Napoleon's exile on Saint Helena and in a European order redefined by the Vienna Congress, Hegel published his last book, the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820).[2]

Hegel not only witnessed a significant historical period, but he also contended that "reason governs the world and has consequently governed its history."[3] Philosophers will portray Hegel in various ways depending on how they interpret his conception of world history. For instance, Karl Popper argued that Hegel's philosophy of history rests on a dubious dialectical method that is loosely based on the idea of the reconciliation of opposites and ultimately results in the justification of the "existing order."[4] Popper further contended that the German philosopher not only acted in the best interest of the Prussian government of Frederick William III,[5] but that he also was the intellectual father of modern totalitarianism through his glorification of the nation, the state, and the ethical values of war.[6]

However, such a negative portrayal of Hegel's philosophy was uncommon in France during the years René Girard studied and grew up. During the 1930s, Alexandre Kojève presented Hegel's encyclopedic

system as the synthesis and achievement of the entire efforts of Western philosophy since the pre-Socratics. According to Kojève, Hegel described the immanent logic (or real dialectic) of human history. Moreover, Kojève claimed that the German philosopher rightly saw that the post-Napoleonic era marks the beginning of the "end of history," which will culminate in the universal and reciprocal recognition of men's freedom. Ultimately, Hegel's writings captured everything that can be said or thought. As Kojève put it: "Hegel's discourse exhausts *all* the *possibilities* of thought. One cannot bring up any discourse in opposition to him which would not already be a part of his own discourse."[7]

Later, during the 1960s, the main task of modern French philosophy was to get beyond Hegel. However, this proved to be difficult. For how was it possible to defeat an intellectual system which, more than one century ago, already (and supposedly) exhausted "*all* the *possibilities* of thought"?[8]

Those issues not only give an accurate picture of the philosophical context during which Girard published his first major books but also resonate with his own intellectual career.[9] Although he will oppose Hegel starting from *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*,[10] Girard's work will often be compared to the German philosopher's.[11] Even if he "felt an affinity with Hegel's philosophy" during his early career,[12] Girard saw those interpretations as a misreading of his anthropology.[13] And he had, in my opinion, excellent reasons for dismissing comparisons between his work and that of Hegel.

But does Girard shed new light on Hegel's status in the Western philosophical tradition? Admittedly, Girard's stances strongly differ from the usual style employed by studies in German Idealism. He challenges the main tenets of Hegel's philosophy in a straightforward way by boldly stating that it "does not begin with a sufficiently radical conception of violence."[14] This shortcoming, he further argues, is mainly due to the Hegelian idea of the "struggle for recognition," which introduces misguided views on the conflicting nature of human desires. By the same token, the German philosopher, unlike Clausewitz, fails to see that the Napoleonic wars were nothing but the preamble of total war. Eventually, Hegelianism would disseminate dangerous illusions on human history that are certainly not unrelated to the rise of modern totalitarianism. However, Girard does not make moral arguments against Hegel. In his critique, he rather gradually

develops a clear-cut and solid theory of desire and violence. Girard thereby puts forward well-thought and compelling arguments against Hegel that are certainly worthy of consideration.

Girard's Critique of Hegel in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961)

As a reader of Kojève, Girard may not have even thought about dialectic as a method, but rather as the "'movement' of the Real" that Hegel's philosophy intends to "faithfully reflect."[15] Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a propaedeutic to philosophy that intends to enquire into knowledge as it appears to consciousness. The *Phenomenology* introduces a sequence of shapes of consciousness, starting with sensuous certainty and ending with the move toward "absolute knowing." Each shape undergoes the painful experience of being dispossessed of what it initially thought to be certain. However, while consciousness always sees the collapse of its certainty as purely negative, Hegel shows that this standpoint is one-sided. The negativity experienced by consciousness is always a negation of something, that is, a negation that keeps a trace of the determinations it suppresses. The work of the negative preserves what it suppresses and overcomes, and this *Aufhebung* or "sublation" offers a logical transition toward a new shape of consciousness. It is thus Hegel (or the philosopher who already went through the different steps of the *Phenomenology*) who describes the logic implied by consciousness's experience, a logic that aids the move to a further shape of consciousness, positing a new kind of certainty, which, once again, is put to the test—until the final stage of "absolute knowing" where being and thought prove to be identical.

At the time Girard wrote his first book, French philosophers were laying emphasis on two shapes of consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, namely, the "struggle for recognition" and the "unhappy consciousness." Alexandre Kojève presented the "struggle for recognition" and the "master and slave dialectic" as the cornerstones of Hegel's philosophy. Several years before Kojève's lectures on *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Jean Wahl published *Le Malheur de la Conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel* (1929),[16] an important essay on Hegel's "unhappy consciousness," which would be very influential on the development of French existentialism.

In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard shows his awareness of this context, remarking: "The two themes of *Phenomenology of the Mind* which particularly interest contemporary readers are the 'unhappy consciousness' and the 'dialectic of master and slave.'"[17] But he aims to show that these two shapes of consciousness are insufficient to account for the experiences of "metaphysical desire" and "ontological sickness" captured by the great novelists. The "novelistic dialectic," as he calls it, appears as a unique "synthesis" of the "master and slave dialectic" and the "unhappy consciousness." In other words, triangular desire would not find a place in Hegel's philosophy because it synthesizes two shapes of consciousness that he wants to keep distinct.

The Struggle for Recognition and the Unhappy Consciousness

In Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the "struggle for recognition" and the "unhappy consciousness" both belong to the stage of "self-consciousness," whose starting point is the certainty that consciousness has about itself. At first, this self-certainty is affirmed through desire, which negates the independence of objects by turning them into means of satisfaction. However, the desiring consciousness will come to experience that the independence of objects persists. As Hegel puts it, "self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object is unable to supersede it; it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well."[18] Desire therefore results in a never-ending process in which consciousness's self-certainty cannot truly be ascertained.

So far, consciousness has mainly experienced its emptiness. But Hegel shows that this experience is not final. What is at stake is consciousness's independence in respect to the natural or biological world. While this independence cannot be confirmed merely through desire and consumption, it might be recognized and desired as such by *another* consciousness. The next step for consciousness is to prove to another its "independence over life itself."[19] The only way for consciousness to attest this independence is to negate animal life or, to put it otherwise, to show the other its willingness to sacrifice its own life. From that point on, we enter a relation between two agents. Each one is determined to prove its independence to the other through radical self-sacrifice, and this mutual aim gives rise to a struggle to the death. *Although they do not see that their aims are perfectly identical,*

each agent desires what the other desires, namely, to be recognized as more than a mere living organism. This reciprocal desire will lead to a reciprocal violence in which both agents jointly push themselves to put their lives at risk. Nonetheless, Hegel notices that no one can gain recognition if the struggle ends in violent death.[20] Both agents need to survive because, otherwise, the negation of life would not be ascertained by another consciousness. That is not to say that Hegel denies that most historical struggles are deadly. His observation is a strictly logical one; he aims to show what is required for there to be recognition, rather than to picture an actual specific event. Following these logical remarks, someone has to cling to his life and abandon the struggle. One of the agents, namely the slave, steps back during conflict, while the other, the master, does not yield, putting his life at substantial risk. Henceforth, we enter a new relation in which the slave works for his master's enjoyment. At first, the master believes himself to be recognized as pure self-consciousness, and the slave takes himself as inessential—as Hegel puts it, "*servitude has the lord for its essential reality*."[21]

However, the *Phenomenology* expands on the logic of their experience and shows that the master and slave relation turns out to be the opposite of what it seemed to be. The ostensibly independent master is actually dependent on the slave's work, while the slave experiences something far more significant. Having backed down during the struggle after facing the possibility of his death,[22] the slave thereby discovers that the experience of his nothingness can be preserved in himself. In addition, the negativity experienced in the fear of death is actively expressed in his labor. Indeed, the slave does not negate objects for consumption, but transforms them for his master's satisfaction. By delaying his desires and working for the master, he keeps the trace of his active negation in the natural world. The experiences of death and labor are typical examples of how the negative operates toward *Aufhebung* or "sublation": while death is "Nothingness maintained in Being,"[23] labor is a negating activity maintained in objects. Although the slave sees the master as nearly his own essence, the slave is actually the one who begins to prove his independence from nature by simultaneously preserving and overcoming it. In the end, the master does not achieve authentic recognition, since the slave has been reduced to the

rank of an object, whose recognition thus cannot be regarded by the master as proof of his purportedly essential independence from natural life.[24]

Let us turn to the unhappy consciousness that posits God (or, as Hegel puts it, the "Unchangeable") as the essence of its contingent being. Self-consciousness is now divided within itself; it is defined by the split between its universal and individual character. The unhappiness of consciousness is caused by its persistent effort and inability to solve this splitting. Whatever its relation to God, the logical incompatibility between the individual and the universal is not surpassed. To become one with God, consciousness first engages in religious devotion. Concepts and rationality are dismissed in favor of an immediate relation to God through prayers or mystical experiences. Nonetheless, consciousness's feelings in religious devotion turn out to be deeply individual and evanescent. In its first reaching for the divine, the unhappy consciousness only encounters its mirror image.[25] A further way consists in relating to God through consciousness's own activity, rather than passive feelings. The talents and achievements of human work, as well as the earthly means of enjoyment, are then regarded as God's gifts. God recognizes the unhappy consciousness through His benevolence, and the unhappy consciousness recognizes Him in acts of thanksgiving. But, once again, this new sense of oneness with the universal turns out to be illusory. In the end, it is still consciousness taken as a particular being (with his specific talents, achievements, and enjoyments) that rests at the center of the gift and counter-gift process. The unhappy consciousness does not truly renounce itself (i.e., it does not renounce its own contingency) but complies to a set of behaviors and beliefs that merely asserts its individuality.[26] In other words, the God to whom consciousness addresses thanksgivings is nothing more but the grandiose reflection of its own activity. The obstacle separating the unhappy consciousness from God is its ever-changing and singular self that the practice of ascetism will eventually aim to remove. But this third and final attempt to become one with God will lead consciousness to the dead end of self-obsession and misery. On the one hand, it is impossible to act on his own contingent individuality in order to free himself from it (this amounts to the same absurdity than the story of Baron Munchausen saving himself from drowning by pulling his own hair). On the other hand, ascetism's emphasis on the natural functions of the body (food, sleep, sexuality, etc.) betrays an attitude which overvalues what should normally be taken as the least

essential. While the body's natural functions are mostly insignificant from a universal or God-like point of view, the unhappy consciousness adds an exaggerated significance to them by regarding its own body as traversed by evil presences that ought to be mastered.[27]

According to Hegel, consciousness can free itself from itself only by submitting to a priest who acts as a particular mediator of God.[28] In any case, the most important aspect for our topic is how Hegel describes the unhappiness of consciousness. As we saw, consciousness's contingent individuality constantly reappears under the deceptive guise of selfless attitudes. In addition, the more the unhappy consciousness aims to renounce itself, the more the distance between itself and God is unbridgeable. Consciousness's desire for God constantly escalates with His seeming resistance; its religious devotions, thanksgivings, and ascetic practices are persistently vain, and its longing for the divine continuously bounces back as feelings of emptiness and incompleteness.

The Novelistic Dialectic

Girard introduces his first critique of Hegel in the concluding remarks of the fourth chapter of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. In this chapter (which, interestingly enough, is entitled "Master and Slave"),[29] two phenomena belonging to the realm of "internal mediation"—the contagious nature of human desires and the camouflaged struggles of romantic passions—are Girard's main focus. At this point, it is worth remembering that while external mediation entails a distance between the disciple and the model of desire which prevents rivalry, internal mediation suppresses this safe distance.

Generally speaking, the disciple's desires are not only copied from the desires of the model but also unwittingly suggest to other persons a model who ought to be copied. When the objects of the mediator's desires cannot be shared, and when individuals are no longer separated by significant spatial, temporal, intellectual, and social differences, the propagation of "metaphysical desire" becomes all the more effective and problematic.[30] Henceforth, agents can no longer be distinguished through the disciple and model divide; each is both a disciple and model for another. They are entering what Girard calls the realm of "double or reciprocal mediation," that is, the context in which the imitation of desire is mediated on both sides

of the relation. Reciprocal imitation, however, goes beyond the agents' awareness; it operates blindly while each aims to affirm his difference over the other. Therefore, as Girard explains, even characters of seemingly sound mind can start to act like Don Quixote and be contaminated by his insanity.[31] At this point, a first comparison between Girard and Hegel can be drawn. In the Hegelian "struggle for recognition," agents push themselves to put their lives at risk through reciprocal and violent imitation. Each has the same desire to be recognized by the other as independent from nature (in its biological sense), and rivals do not acknowledge the actual similarity of their desires but are mostly aware of the aim of making their own desire prevail. Hence, there are evident commonalities between the "struggle for recognition" and the general features of "double mediation." In double mediation, "the players are opposed but alike, and even interchangeable, for they make exactly the same movements. . . . The players are *partners*, but they only agree to disagree."[32] As in Hegel's account of the struggle to the death, "Each imitates the other while claiming that his own desire is prior and previous."[33]

The conflicts pertaining to "double mediation" take a subtler form in romantic passion. Although sexual desire seems at first to be a counterexample to triangular desire, Girard shows that, even in this case, the disciple still desires an object according to a model. For the beloved is the mediator suggesting his or her body as an object of desire to the lover (or disciple).[34] The success of such a mediation of desire generates in the lover's eyes the illusion that the beloved is, like Narcissus, strictly in love with his or her own self. Put differently, the romantic triangle creates the misleading impression that the beloved does not need to rely on other's desires and is perfectly self-sufficient. Since "metaphysical desire" is desire for fullness of being, it is not exaggerated to state that the beloved becomes a God-like figure for the lover. Nonetheless, this illusion can only persist if the triangle does not become visible or, to put it otherwise, the beloved's deceptive self-sufficiency can be maintained only if his or her attitudes do not reveal a need for the lover's desire. In double mediation, both agents will struggle to preserve this deception. Julien Sorel and Mathilde de La Mole in *The Red and the Black* illustrate this idea, as they enter a game of dupery in which the loser is the one who fails to feign indifference toward the other convincingly. Girard draws a parallel between this "dialectic of indifference" and Hegel's master and slave dialectic:

> Henceforth no reversal of imitation is possible, for the *slave's* admitted desire destroys that of the *master* and ensures his genuine indifference. This indifference in turn makes the slave desperate and increases his desire.[35]

In the "dialectic of indifference," each agent aims to be recognized as self-sufficient in order to attract the desire of the other, which bears strong resemblance to the Hegelian struggle to the death in which agents seek to be recognized as independent from nature. Just as in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, someone will back down during the struggle. The slave, as Girard sees it, is the one who breaks the illusion of indifference by giving into the temptation to reveal his desire for the other, so that by throwing "herself into" Julien Sorel's "arms," "Mathilde admits that she is a *slave*."[36] As in Hegel's dialectic, the master appears to the slave as essential and seems to have risen beyond his human condition. Furthermore, the Girardian master is similar to the Hegelian master insofar as the recognition he gained turns out to be worthless. By revealing his desire for the master, the slave shows that his indifference and self-sufficiency were not authentic and is, thereby, in the master's eyes, brought back to his all-too-human condition. Since the slave has shown that he depends on the other's desire, his submission cannot be seen as proof of the master's supposed self-sufficiency.

The master and slave relation analyzed in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* is also reminiscent of Hegel's "unhappy consciousness." The unhappy consciousness is unable to become one with God. Similarly, Girard describes the unhappiness of human beings who mutually divinize each other but never achieve a sense of oneness with the person they desire or love. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the more consciousness tries to reach God, the more it fails. The same seeming paradox applies to the world of romantic delusions where "men become Gods in the eye of each other."[37] The Girardian slave sees the other as a God and has the weakness to believe that he could get closer to him by revealing his desire. Instead, the distance that separates him from the other becomes even more unbridgeable when that desire is revealed. The Girardian master first believed that the person he desired was a God-like figure but eventually comes to notice that the latter's self-sufficiency was a mere illusion. Like the unhappy consciousness that constantly rediscovers the presence of its contingent individuality under the guise of its religious attitudes, the Girardian master

realizes that he only projected his own fantasies of self-sufficiency onto the slave.

In the end, "the hero of internal mediation is an unhappy consciousness who relives the primordial struggle [for recognition] beyond all physical threat and stakes his freedom on the least of his desires."[38] However, Girard's remark already introduces some key elements of his critique of Hegel. It is only through combining different elements of Hegel's philosophy that the "dialectic of indifference" can be correctly described and comprehended. On the one hand, the master and slave dialectic does not account for the quest for transcendence of the "novelistic dialectic." On the other hand, Hegel's thoughts on the unhappy consciousness do not account for the *interindividual* aspects of Girard's dialectic.

What is more, both the master and slave dialectic and the unhappy consciousness are outmoded stages of human history that should not apply to events or phenomena occurring after the Napoleonic era. Hegel's "struggle for recognition," Girard argues, belongs to a violent and archaic past that, despite some interesting structural analogies, has little to do with Julien Sorel's and Mathilde de La Mole's master and slave relation.[39] In the "dialectic of indifference" depicted in Stendhal's novel, brute force and courage do not prevail. The use of physical or verbal violence from one of the two agents will rather show a dependence on the other's desires.[40] Signs of aggressive behavior will remove the individual's mask of self-sufficiency and automatically turn him or her into a slave. But, most importantly, Girard's point is that, if one follows the main tenets of Hegel's philosophy, authentic recognition should normally be considered as accomplished starting from the implementation of the Napoleonic Code and the birth of the modern state (based on the principles of freedom and equality of rights). In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel indeed notices that:

> *The fight for recognition in the extreme form here indicated can only occur in the state of nature, where men live only as individuals*; by contrast it is absent from civil society and the political state because what constitutes the result of this combat, namely recognition, is already present there.[41]

Girard, on the contrary, considers that the "struggle for recognition" is ineliminable. It can take many forms (including seemingly nonviolent or non-conflictual ones) and will persist in every political, economic, or social

context. Men, as he puts it, "will adapt themselves to the circumstances which seem least propitious to discord and they will never tire of inventing new forms of conflict."[42]

The unhappy consciousness also belongs to a world bearing little resemblance with present times. Although this point is sometimes disputed, some Hegel scholars interpret the unhappy consciousness as a depiction of medieval Christianity. In their readings of Hegel, Wahl, and Kojève show that the historical preservation and overcoming of Christianity leads to the end of the unhappiness of consciousness and to the birth of a new religion of man. This idealistic view of history is, most probably, the main target of Girard's critique. Hegel's unhappy consciousness is "the outcome of a stubborn orientation toward the transcendent, of an inability to relinquish religious patterns of desire when history has outgrown them,"[43] while the main focus of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* is the modern age of internal mediation where the quest for the divine has been displaced to inter-human relations. According to Girard, the weakening of Christianity does not lead to the happy ending of humanism in which men would finally come to recognize their equal and mutual freedom. With the dawning of the Napoleonic era, men's longing for transcendence does not vanish but begins seeking "satisfaction in the human world."[44] Traditional belief in God recedes as men gradually become "Gods in the eye of each other."[45] The idea of a historical change pertaining to the direction in which the human need for transcendence is channeled plays a significant role in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. This evolution is defined as the move from "vertical transcendency" to "deviated transcendency." We may say that, from Girard's perspective, Hegelianism mistook the age of "deviated transcendency" for the historical triumph of humanism.

This first criticism of Hegelianism addresses the theoretical and historical limitations of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in a thought-provoking way. Despite its apparent simplicity, the hypothesis of triangular desire can account for phenomena which only a rather intricate synthesis of Hegelian notions may explain. Nonetheless, Girard's approach is also open to criticism. For Hegel would not have denied that, in many instances (including Julien and Mathilde's romantic relation), authentic reciprocal recognition cannot be achieved. Recognition is the outcome of *Bildung*, that is, of the continuous self-formation of men's freedom through culture. According to Hegel, social institutions bear the mark of this *Bildung* and

ought to be safeguarded by the state. Recognition entails specific conditions of possibility and does certainly not permeate every dimension of human existence. In addition, Hegel does not regard the struggle for recognition as a general pattern for every kind of human conflict. For instance, he notices that "dueling" (whether in the Middle Ages or in modern history) should not be confused with the struggle for recognition.[46] Dueling is a historically and socially determined way of settling a legal and personal dispute. Contrary to the struggle for recognition, the stakes of the conflict are purely egotistic. In dueling, rivals primarily aim to maintain their own particular and subjective claims by killing the other (i.e., they want to show that they are within their own rights or that their honor is safe). They do not aim to be recognized by the other in their willingness to sacrifice their own lives. In this instance, rivals do not care to prove their essential independence over nature in the eyes of the other. Consequently, Hegel acknowledges the existence of distinct kinds of human conflicts and would not necessarily have regarded Girard's "dialectic of indifference" (in which, incidentally, individuals rarely put their lives at substantial risk) as a modern example of the struggle for recognition.

Demystifying the Struggle for Recognition (1968–2007)

In the years following *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard gradually turned his research to the study of Greek tragedy and the anthropology of religion. This second phase of his career culminated with the publication of *Violence and the Sacred* (1972). It was also a decisive period during which Girard would criticize Hegel's philosophy in a more direct manner. Starting from the late 1960s, Girard's point is that the *Phenomenology*'s supposedly logical transition leading from the struggle to the death to the master and slave relation entails a dismissal of the most radical conflict scenario. Far from being the "'movement' of the Real,"[47] Hegel's dialectic is a theoretical construct resting on a watered-down account of human violence.

Hegel's Category-Mistake

In his 1968 paper entitled "Symmetry and Dissymmetry in the Myth of Oedipus," Girard was already on the way to discovering the main elements

of his theory of archaic myths. Right after outlining the idea that "the myth never wants to face . . . the truth of its own genesis"[48]—i.e., the Thebans put the blame for the plague on Oedipus by accusing him of incest and patricide—Girard addresses the merits and limitations of Hegel's philosophy:

> It is always the expulsion of the scapegoat, in one form or another, which resolves, in the Western world, the conflict between Same and Same. But the operation is often disguised under some flattering name: *dépassement*, synthesis, progress, science, humanism, religion, etc. Hegel's greatness lies in having read in history the ineluctable dilemma of Oedipus and Creon: kill or be killed, expel or be expelled. *But this dilemma was then conjured away by Hegel. He thought that two desires must behave like two concepts that cannot fail to agree once nothing separates them any longer*.[49]

According to Girard, Hegel's struggle for recognition rests on a category-mistake that attributes the properties of ideas or concepts to human desires. In respect to ideas or concepts, identity is defined as non-contradictory and difference as contradictory. *But the same does not apply to desire.* Desires are different when they relate to distinct objects. In such a case, the desires do not collide; they are non-contradictory. Desires are identical when they relate to the same object. If this object is close to both agents and cannot be shared by them, then desires collide; they are contradictory. Hence, applying the classical logical law of non-contradiction to human desires amounts to a category-mistake.[50] How may such a category-mistake precisely relate to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*? The distinctive logic of desire is exemplified by Hegel's account of the struggle to the death. Agents jointly push themselves to put their lives at risk because of the collision of their two identical desires.[51] Here, identity clearly equals contradiction. However, Hegel will dismiss the radical problem raised by the struggle to the death by arbitrarily moving from a desire-related understanding of identity to a conceptually related understanding of identity. Indeed, the necessity for both agents to stay alive —or for the slave to back down during the struggle—has nothing to do with the logic of desire, but is rather a command imposed *from the outside* by virtue of the classical law of non-contradiction. If one adopts the detached standpoint of the philosopher, then consciousness must prove identical to itself on a pure conceptual level; its independence from the biological world ought to be verified in the eyes of another consciousness. Thereby, the act

of killing and violent death will be defined as a contradiction in terms, for it is illogical for consciousness to suppress the necessary means for ascertaining its identity. It follows from this that human desires are, as a matter of fact, constrained to "*behave like two concepts*."[52] It will thus become possible to distinguish the two consciousnesses in struggle as master and slave and to analyze the "Lordship and Bondage" relation in a dialectical way as a first step on the (already traced) path toward reciprocal recognition.

A significant consequence of the Hegelian category-mistake is that the most radical problems inherent to human conflict are already solved in an artificial way at an early stage of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. For, although master and slave are still far away from authentic reciprocal recognition, their relation already represents a decisive step in which the logic of desire has been ruled out by the logic of ideas. At this point, recognition becomes a conceptual necessity supplanting the concrete conflictual features of human desires. Eventually, it is worth noting that Girard does not dismiss the idea of recognition in its empirical sense, i.e., he does not deny the existence of recognition claims among individuals, but rejects the Hegelian theory of recognition, which, in his view, mixes up the logical properties of concepts and desires.

Monstrous Doubles

Let us now tackle Girard's critique of Hegel in *Violence and the Sacred*. In a mimetic crisis, violence spreads like a contagious disease through the community. Unlike in Hegel's struggle for recognition, no logical necessity commands the opponents to stay alive. Human rivalries do not have any built-in limits. All the differences structuring the social order are erased by individuals' violent reciprocity. An accurate description of this growing state of *undifferentiation* requires us, again, to carefully distinguish the logic of concepts from the logic of desire. On the one hand, the analytical or conceptual approach corresponds to the detached (or third person) point of view in which the mimetic crisis is observed from the outside. From this perspective, although agents might be distinguished as masters and slaves at distinct moments, the entire sequence of their rivalry shows that reciprocal imitation prevails. Across time, the detached observer notices a continuous reversal of roles and positions; in a seemingly unending process, former

masters become slaves, and former slaves become masters. From the conceptual vantage point, individuals are strictly identical. On the other hand, the logic of desire corresponds to the agents' point of view within the crisis. From this perspective, the identity of the agent's desire with the desire of the other is always experienced as a contradiction between himself and the other. The identity of the different agents noticed from the conceptual perspective can never be acknowledged as such by the agents themselves. For them, identity is constantly seen as a difference placing them opposite to another. Both the conceptual perspective and the agents' point of view are part of the same reality. The agents do not recognize themselves as identical, however, and cannot erase the reality of reciprocal imitation, noticed by the conceptual perspective, that gradually eliminates the differences separating them. The more agents become identical from the conceptual perspective, the more they will oppose each other. And the more agents oppose each other, the more they will misperceive their increasingly reciprocal, yet unacknowledged, imitation of each other as an assertion of difference.[53] Consequently, the mimetic crisis will reach a critical moment where the agents experience their own similarities, visible as it can be, as something alien to them. The acceleration of violent reciprocity between the agents makes their perceived differences "shift ever faster and more rapidly as the crisis grows in intensity."[54] These differences progressively appear to the agents as an increasingly rapid succession of still images creating the illusion of movement. Ultimately, differences can no longer be identified by them as distinct moments of the conflict but melt into a nightmarish hallucination. This nearly cinematographic phenomenon represents the moment where agents confront each another as *monstrous doubles*—the penultimate step of the mimetic crisis before the collective murder of the surrogate victim.

According to Girard, Hegel's conception of human violence prevents us from recognizing the reality of monstrous doubles. The struggle for recognition, indeed, does not take accurate measure of human beings' propensity to be unaware of their similarities in a state of conflict. The theory of monstrous doubles is possible only if one avoids confusing the logic of desire with the logic of concepts. Girard aims to show precisely how both logics evolve in tandem, without making one supplant the other. He thus notices that the phenomenon of undifferentiation observed from outside the conflict (the logic of concepts) is always sustained by the

illusion of difference separating agents from within the conflict (the logic of desire). Actual similarities between agents only appear to them under the guise of the illusion of difference, which, at its most extreme degree, takes the hallucinatory guise of monstrous doubles.[55] As Girard observes, the escalation to undifferentiation "affords no stability of any sort, no synthetic resolution," so there is indeed "no point in invoking a master-slave dialectic" as an explanation.[56]

Years later, in his book on Shakespeare, Girard again opposes his theory of monstrous doubles to Hegel's master and slave dialectic. His study of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* gives him the opportunity to supplement his first critique of Hegel in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* with the insights gained in *Violence and the Sacred*. In Shakespeare's play, not only are Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius, and Helena going through the deceptive "dialectic of indifference," but they are also plunged into a mimetic crisis by the influence of Puck's love potion. Although, as noticed by Girard, it might "be tempting to compare" the winners and losers of romantic seduction to Hegel's master and slave, we should avoid such an analogy, which "brings an aura of permanence and rationality that makes it inappropriate."[57] As a matter of fact, Shakespeare's play pushes the "dialectic of indifference" a step further by showing how the roles and positions of the different characters are constantly and ever more rapidly reversed. In an unceasing movement, each character becomes at turns a worthless animal or a divinized model for another. These differences shift more and more rapidly and create the illusion of movement; they melt into the hallucinatory vision of monstrous doubles that Girard contends bears no resemblance to Hegel's dialectic: "When the dog and the god, the beast and the angel, and all such contraries oscillate fast enough, they become one, but not in the sense of some harmonious 'synthesis' à la Hegel."[58]

Appropriative Mimesis

In his last book, Girard acknowledges the influence Hegel had had on his early writings but also offers a summary of how his more mature writings should be distinguished from Hegel's philosophy. In accordance with his earlier critique of Hegel's category-mistake, Girard argues that the struggle for recognition arbitrarily dismisses the most violent conflict scenario. As he puts it in *Battling to the End*: "The desire for recognition prevents them

[the master and the slave] from killing each other. How would they be able to recognize each other if one of them died or they were both killed?"[59] In the same vein, he affirms: "Hegelian dialectic does not work for me: I find it too rationalist and not tragic enough. It flies through conflict without ruffling its feathers."[60]

But Girard now also adds a more anthropological dimension to this critique. The conceptual necessity of recognition, as he notices, operates like a violence inhibition mechanism, which bears a strong resemblance to "dominance hierarchies in animal societies."[61] The display of signs of submission by the slave to the master immediately results in the cessation of the struggle. Similar regulatory mechanisms of intra-specific aggression have been observed in certain animals by ethologists such as Konrad Lorenz. However, according to Girard, it is the more advanced biological instinct of mimicry that sets apart man from the rest of the animal kingdom and explains the extent of his violence. The mimetic crisis cannot be regulated through dominance patterns, but only through the *scapegoat mechanism*. Hegel's "Lordship and Bondage" hierarchy therefore introduces a philosophical paradigm that inevitably overlooks the violent origins of culture and archaic religion.[62]

Girard also maintains that his theory of monstrous doubles differs significantly from the Hegelian "struggle for recognition": "The fight to the death is thus much more than a simple desire for recognition. It is not a master-slave dialectic, but *a merciless battle between twins*."[63] *Battling to the End*, however, goes a step further to vindicate the singularity of mimetic theory. The two key features of desire in Hegel's dialectic are (1) the antagonists aim to prove that they are more than mere living organisms, that is, their purpose is to get rid of the world of objects in the broadest sense of the word, and (2) they not only desire to be recognized but also desire the desire of the other, that is, both desire to be desired by the other as a being transcending the natural world. Mimetic theory is different to the extent that: (1) desire implies a disciple, a mediator, *and* an object, and (2) desire rests on appropriative mimesis, that is, individuals do not merely desire to be desired by another, but they desire either to take ownership of an object (seemingly or actually) desired by the model or to possess the purported qualities of the mediator to whom the object belongs to. The close spatial, temporal, and intellectual distance between the disciple, the mediator, and

the object (apparently or really) desired by the mediator, as well as the impossibility of sharing the object, are the first parameters determining the emergence of conflict. When the mediator blocks access to the object to the disciple, the former becomes a model-obstacle. By the same token, the disciple's desire is reinforced by the obstacle and reinforces the model's desire in turn. Thereupon, both agents enter the stage of double-mediation, as each becomes a model-obstacle for the other. A struggle in which agents lose their initial interest for the object will ensue. Nonetheless, as observed by Girard, each now wants "to be what the other becomes when he possesses this or that object."[64] This aim to take ownership of the model-obstacle's supposed qualities can be pushed to the extreme of killing, and explains why the stability of Hegel's master and slave relation turns out to be misleading. From Girard's perspective, the slave will not simply accept the master's domination, but will still desire to appropriate the latter's qualities—in Hegel's case scenario, the quality of having apparently transcended the natural world. Dominance patterns, as we saw, do not apply to human conflict. The slave cannot merely behave like a dog baring his throat when faced by a stronger opponent; rather, his desire to reverse his relationship with the master will persist. In the end, Hegel's dialectic rests on the mistaken assumption that the slave could be content with recognizing the master as his nearly own essence.[65]

War and World History

In *Battling to the End*, Girard compares Carl von Clausewitz's realistic stances on war to Hegel's idealistic conception of human history. Although Girard significantly distances himself from Raymond Aron's interpretation of *On War*, he has most probably been influenced—like many other scholars of the same period—by the French political theorist's remarks on the supposed impact of Hegel's philosophy on Clausewitz's writings.[66] Before the publication of Aron's book *Clausewitz: Philosopher of War* in 1976, numerous studies in the United States and in France had stressed the Hegelian aspects of the Prussian military theorist's thought. Aron's conclusion, however, was that Hegel's influence on Clausewitz was sheer myth. While Clausewitz followed the teachings of J. G. Kiesewetter, a popularizer of Kant's philosophy, at the *Allgemeine Kriegsschule* in Berlin,

Hegel's name is not mentioned a single time in his manuscripts and letters. Aron further contends that no methodological commonalities between Clausewitz and Hegel can be observed. Like Aron, although in a different vein, Girard also believed that Clausewitz and Hegel had nothing in common, leaving aside the fact that both lived through the same historical period and that both "were devoted to the State."[67] Both are dialectical thinkers, but not at all in the same sense.[68]

The Hegelian Paradox of War

Clausewitz's dialectic rests on the relation between "absolute war" and "real war." *Absolute war* is a concept referring to a duel with no built-in limits. In the first chapter of *On War*, Clausewitz states that "war is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes."[69]

Girard notices that the principle of reciprocal action is comparable to his conception of mimetic rivalry. As reciprocal action pushes states to an "escalation towards extremes," so "violent imitation . . . *makes adversaries more and more alike*" and pushes them toward the trend of mutual annihilation.[70] According to Clausewitz, the escalation toward extremes in absolute war is prevented by the actual physical, economic, and political factors of armed conflicts (i.e., the factors of real war). Girard is at the same time frightened and intrigued by the idea that the concept of absolute war may progressively come to correspond to reality. This insight is at the center of *Battling to the End*. Girard contends that Clausewitz helps us to understand the apocalyptic dimension of modern history. He helps us to see that the key features of Napoleonic wars—mechanization, mass mobilization, alignments of combatants on the ideals of the state—already meant the beginning of the end of traditional war.

As for Hegel, his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* presents a perspective on international wars that is at once somewhat pessimistic and deeply optimistic. On the one hand, Kant's project of *Perpetual Peace* is dismissed. On the international scene, Hegel contends, states relate to each other as particular sovereign entities. They are comparable to individuals who define themselves through what they negate or exclude, that is, their enemies. Hence, agreements or treatises between states are "tainted with

contingency," and Kant's idea of "a league of sovereigns to settle disputes between states" turns out to be a mere utopia.[71] On the other hand, Hegel believes that modern warfare "will be ultimately more humane and less barbaric than wars fought in the past."[72] Thus, despite a somehow realistic standpoint, Hegel overlooked the possibility of total war.

This aspect, of course, did not go unnoticed by Girard. Hegel saw Napoleon "as an incarnation of the Spirit"[73]—or, as he famously wrote in his letter to Niethammer, the "world-soul" passing under his window in Jena[74]—whereas Clausewitz saw the French emperor as the "god of war."[75] In Hegel, we find the idealistic portrayal of Napoleon as an instrument of reason in world history. In Clausewitz, we can find the realistic portrayal of Napoleon as the one who prefigured total war. But why did Hegel, who seems to have "distrusted" the Enlightenment's optimism,[76] overlook what Clausewitz helps us to see? The usual answer to this question consists in noting that, due to the tenets of his philosophy of history, Hegel believed that the end of international wars would take place in a certain future of which the specific contours cannot yet be determined. Girard certainly endorses this standpoint when he states that for Hegel "the unity [of reality and thought] is at the end of the indeterminacy of history"[77] and when he notices that, according to the German philosopher, the state as a "'concrete universal' . . . has nothing to do with specific states. The rational universality of the State is supposed to become a worldwide organization, but in the meantime individual states will continue to wage war."[78]

But there is definitively more to Girard's critique. The problem is that what we perceive as realistic in Hegel's views on war already presupposes a conception of violence and conflict that is far from entirely realistic. Like Thomas Hobbes, Hegel observes that, on the international scene, sovereign states are "in *a state of nature* in relation to one another."[79] *However, in Hegel, the violence of the state of nature specifically refers to the "struggle for recognition."* Hence, from a Girardian perspective, it is not surprising at all that Hegel did not anticipate the collapse of the limits of international conflicts. Since the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* apply the paradigmatic "struggle for recognition" to war, the definition of interstate violence always already assumes an internal limit that cannot be bypassed.[80] States cannot push themselves to mutual destruction; their relation to one another is automatically regulated through the dominance

patterns that we saw at work in the master and slave dialectic. Therefore, it is not exclusively due to his philosophy of world history that Hegel did not foresee the possibility of total war; right from the start, his intellectual system is not equipped with the relevant concepts that could have helped comprehending this catastrophic possibility. The missing piece in Hegel's philosophy is nothing but Clausewitz's concept of absolute war.

Modern Warfare and the Apocalypse

While humanity awaits the end of history, wars still have a role to play and are, at least according to Hegel, less irrational than they might first seem. In modern civil society, the interplay of egoistic interests generates unity through what Adam Smith called the "invisible hand." It is the sphere of private rights and economic transactions in which, by virtue of a blind mechanism, individuals become co-dependent in a system of needs. However, the balance of interests achieved in civil society is fragile, not only because it is governed by egoistic aims but also because economic crises may split the community, giving birth to a miserable and hostile populace. Furthermore, the duty to defend the state in times of war involves the sacrifice of "*the security of the life and property* of individuals,"[81] in other words, the sacrifice of the very principles of civil society. Hence, the political obligations regarding war must depend on the state, which must not be confused with the main tenets of civil society. Far from being an assemblage of private interests, the state is an ethical community entailing shared standards and values. At the level of the state, individuals do not merely recognize each other formally just to pursue their subjective well-being but recognize each other in a universal and rational way. In this regard, the reality of war brings back a sense of community and unity, which risks being put asleep by the habits of civil society. War not only reveals the contingencies of the materialistic way of living but also encourages individuals to align themselves with the universality of the state. In other words, war contains an ethical component,[82] and it may be defined as "a type of school for the civic education of the bourgeois."[83] As noticed by Girard: "Through war, the State reminds individuals from time to time of the need to sacrifice individual interest and merge it back into the universal. The hero appears as Spirit by denying biology."[84] However, it is worth noting that Hegel refers to a modern and selfless form of heroism, which

must not be confused with the chivalrous or aristocratic virtues of the warrior. The heroism of the modern warrior is a pure willingness to sacrifice himself for a common ideal that is nothing but the objectivized universality of law. Girard shows a proper understanding of Hegel's political philosophy when he observes that, for the latter, modern wars do not confront particular individuals fighting for the sake of honor, but individuals merged into distinct "ethical wholes."[85] What is more, Hegel states that the abstract feature of modern warfare is reinforced by modern weaponry, especially firearms. The invention of the gun "did not come about by chance";[86] it ensures that soldiers fight against each other in an impersonal way, that is, in accordance with the virtue of selflessness of modern warfare.[87]

Hence, Hegel anticipated the rationalization and mechanization of warfare. Nonetheless, he also believed that those advances would gradually put a limit to the destructive potential of international conflicts. Girard, on the contrary, contends that the use of technology tends to destroy the former limitations of codified war. He also considers that states are less and less able to contain the violence of armed conflicts—in Chantre's words, "politics follows on the heels of war."[88] In the end, the Hegelian theory of warriors merging into an ethical whole brings us even closer to Clausewitz's concept of absolute war—especially insofar as it calls to mind the mass mobilization during the Napoleonic wars.

Nevertheless, Girard also said that Hegel and Clausewitz "could be considered the two greatest thinkers on war."[89] How may we explain this statement? Two possible answers can be put forward. A first response consists in observing that, regardless of our moral judgements, a comparative reading of Hegel and Clausewitz provides us with an accurate description of the history of modern warfare. Ideological wars, for instance, push Hegel's theories a step further. Combatants are urged to merge into an ethical whole and mechanization of warfare is strongly encouraged. However, what Hegel saw as the indeterminate end of history (i.e., we do not know how and when history will end) is redefined by revolutionaries as a clear-cut and ultimate stage of human history—the defeat of the ruling classes and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Girard's words, "Leninism was nothing more than a form of military Hegelianism."[90] As for Clausewitz, his thoughts on the relation between absolute war and real war

help us to understand the concrete historical dynamic behind the ideals and ambitions of ideological wars.

The second response is more complex and religious. In Hegel, the violence of war remains an unescapable phenomenon only until the "end of history." In other words, war is both necessary and contingent. It is necessary from a limited present-day perspective and contingent from the broader perspective of world history. Currently, states are still defined by their willingness to wage war. Furthermore, in encouraging combatants to merge into an ethical whole, war acts as a remedy for the internal tensions of the civil society. Thus, Hegel's thoughts constantly oscillate between the two extremes of the founding violence of war and men's reconciliation "at the end of the indeterminacy of history." [91] This aspect obviously interested Girard. According to him, sacralized violence and Christian love are the only two absolutes of Western thought; they are opposite and inevitable absolutes in the history of philosophy,[92] and we can identify them in Hegel's reflections on war. It is worth mentioning that Girard was interested in the Christian aspects of Hegel's work. In *Battling to the End*, he notices that:

> Dialectic presents a position, then the "negation" of that position, and finally a "negation of the negation." To open up to the other, to get outside of oneself through alienation, is to prepare a return to oneself that provides true access to the real, access to real rationality free of any subjectivity. As we can see, this is a philosophical echo of Christ's death and resurrection.[93]

As a matter of fact, God incarnate sacrificing himself on the cross and coming back as Holy Spirit within the religious community ("negation of the negation") corresponds to the movement of the dialectic. Girard certainly was attentive to the fact that Hegel's philosophy can be regarded as an interpretation of world history through the lens of Christianity, that is, as a depiction of God gradually realizing his self-consciousness through the finite minds and actions of human agents. However, Girard regards Hegel's work as a truncated version of the Christian Revelation. As recently shown by Paolo Diego Bubbio and Anselm Tilman Ramelow,[94] Hegel primarily understands sacrifice in terms of self-sacrifice. Whether in the struggle for recognition, in the modern courage of the warrior or in Christ's death on the cross, self-sacrifice (*Aufopferung*) remains pivotal and "typically serves to elevate the particular to the universal and spiritualize it in some way."[95]

Sacrifice understood as sacrifice of the other, or as the collective murder of a surrogate victim, has a far more secondary place in Hegel's philosophy. For Hegel, the crucifixion of Jesus does not reveal what has been hidden since the foundation of the world. By the same token, the German philosopher ignored the apocalyptic dimension of the Christian message. According to Girard, after the unveiling of the scapegoat mechanism through the Passion of Christ, men are gradually deprived of their sacrificial safeguards. Little by little, violence can no longer contain violence. Progressively, the concept of absolute war becomes a reality. Hegel rightly understood that men are never as similar and close to reconciliation as when they enter the most extreme forms of conflict. He comprehended that reconciliation may lie at the very heart of human struggles and that the renunciation of violence through Christian love constitutes an absolute. Girard does not hesitate to state that "this was the veritable and mysterious kernel of [Hegel's] genius."[96] However, the German philosopher turned the possibility of reconciliation into a conceptual and historical necessity. He overlooked the fact that there is a turning point in world history starting from which it is no longer conceivable to discover a "ruse of reason" behind men's violence. He did not notice that Christianity foresaw the likelihood of a historical and global catastrophe.

It would therefore be inaccurate to conclude that Girard merely reproached Hegel for his optimism. Hegel's intellectual dedication to reciprocal recognition and reconciliation implies both a deep understanding of human conflict and an unawareness of the apocalyptic dimension of world history; it implies both a religious wisdom and a misunderstanding of Christianity. The greatness and the shortcomings of his philosophical project are therefore, as Girard reminds us, profoundly bound together:

> Hegel's thought was based on Christianity, and he understood that the voice of unity and love could rise from discord itself, from the destructive and terrible vanity of conflict. However, he did not remember that the wisest men had already failed to make that voice triumph. That failure, which Christian revelation anticipated, was overlooked by Hegel and has been ignored by modern wisdom.[97]

NOTES

1. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. J Miller (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977).

2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

3. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), 31.

4. Karl Popper, *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath*, vol. 2, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1945), 39.

5. Ibid., 31–33.

6. Ibid., 59–75.

7. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 1980), 194.

8. During his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault stated that his "entire epoch . . . is trying to escape from Hegel." However, he also stressed the post-Hegelianism's predicament: "But to make a real escape from Hegel presupposes an exact appreciation of what it costs to detach ourselves from him. It presupposes a knowledge of how close Hegel has come to us, perhaps insidiously. It presupposes a knowledge of what is still Hegelian in that which allows us to think against Hegel; and an ability to gauge how much our resources against him are perhaps still a ruse which he is using against us, and at the end of which he is waiting for us, immobile and elsewhere." See Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge, 1981), 74.

9. A lot could be said on Girard's uniqueness in respect to Hegelianism and post-Hegelianism in France. Even though I will not address this aspect, it is important to keep the French philosophical context in mind. For more details, see Andreas Wilmes, "Portrait of René Girard as a Post-Hegelian: Masters, Slaves, and Monstrous Doubles," *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1 (2017): 57–85, https://doi.org/10.22618/tp.pjcv.20171.1.95007.

10. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1965), 110–12; 158–59; 287–88. In my study, I will leave aside Girard's critique of the Hegelian negative in his first book. I addressed this topic in my paper "Demystifying the Negative: René Girard's Critique of the 'Humanization of Nothingness,'" *Forum Philosophicum* 24, no. 1 (2019): 91–126.

11. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe will criticize Girard for his "refusal to deal directly with Hegel." See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 105. Jean-Marie Domenach will describe Girard as the "Hegel of Christianity." See Jean-Marie Domenach, *Enquête sur les idées contemporaines* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 107. Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen will criticize Girard's "not altogether convincing declaration of anti-Hegelianism" in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 254. Like Borch-Jacobsen, George Erving will stress the commonalities between the theory of mimetic desire and Kojève's reading of Hegel. See George Erving, "René Girard and the Legacy of Alexandre Kojève," *Contagion* 10 (2003): 111–25. For further remarks on the analogies between mimetic theory and Hegelianism, see Eugene Webb, *The Self Between: From Freud to the New Social Psychology of France* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), 116, and Guy Vanheeswijck, "The Place of René Girard in Contemporary Philosophy," *Contagion* 10 (2003): 95–110.

12. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 30.

13. In a 1986 manuscript, Girard states that "some intellectual aspects are still detrimental to the theory of mimetic desire on the level of thought. . . . For instance, one may confuse mimetic desire with Hegel's desire for recognition." ["Certains facteurs intellectuels desservent encore le désir

mimétique sur le plan de la pensée. . . . On peut le confondre, par exemple, avec le désir de reconnaissance de Hegel."] René Girard, "L'amitié qui se transforme en haine," in *Cahier René Girard*, ed. Mark R. Anspach (Paris: Editions de L'Herne, 2008), 198.

14. René Girard, *Battling to the End*, 32.

15. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 179. Girard acknowledged that Kojève influenced his early writings. Given that Kojève offered a very personal reading of Hegel, which is now highly disputed, one may wonder whether this influence biased Girard's critique of Hegel's philosophy. According to me, the answer is yes and no. On the one hand, Paolo Diego Bubbio is right when he argues that, regarding Hegel's ethics of recognition, Girard unreasonably reads the *Phenomenology* through Kojève's eyes. Like Kojève, Girard seems to regard the master and slave dialectic as the pivotal idea of Hegel's theory of recognition. But, as Paolo Diego Bubbio observes, the theory of recognition only achieves its fulfillment later in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, namely during the encounter between the beautiful soul and the hard-hearted judge. See Paolo Diego Bubbio, *Intellectual Sacrifice and Other Mimetic Paradoxes* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018), 175–76. On the other hand, Girard's main concern (and the main topic of my chapter) is Hegel's conception of human violence. In this respect, Girard's critique is convincing and does not rest on the main tenets of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel's philosophy. For an excellent comparative analysis of Girard and Kojève, see George Erving, "René Girard and the Legacy of Alexandre Kojève": 111–25. I summarized the main differences between Girard and Kojève in my paper "Portrait of René Girard as a Post-Hegelian: Masters, Slaves, and Monstrous Doubles": 57–85.

16. Jean Wahl, *Le Malheur de la Conscience dans la Philosophie de Hegel* (Brionne: Editions Gérard Monfort, 1951. First published 1929). Later, in the 1940s, the Hegelian scholar Jean Hyppolite stated: "Unhappy consciousness is the fundamental theme of the *Phenomenology* [*of Spirit*]." See Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 190.

17. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 111.

18. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 109.

19. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 58.

20. "This trial by death, however, does away with the truth which was supposed to issue from it, and so, too, with the certainty of self generally. For just as life is the natural setting of consciousness, independence without absolute negativity, so death is the natural negation of consciousness, negation without independence, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114.

21. Ibid., 117. Emphasis mine.

22. "For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations." Ibid.

23. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 48.

24. As Kojève puts it: "The Master has fought and risked his life for a recognition without value for him. For he can be satisfied only by recognition from one whom he recognizes as worthy of recognizing him." Ibid., 19.

25. "At the same time, however, this essence is the unattainable *beyond* which, in being laid hold of, flees, or rather has already flown. It has already flown; for it is in part the Unchangeable which thinks of itself as an individuality, and consciousness therefore directly attains in it its own self—its

own self, but as the antithesis of the Unchangeable; instead of laying hold of the essence, it only feels it and has fallen back into itself." Ibid., 131.

26. "Thus the entire movement is reflected not only in the actual desiring, working, and enjoyment, but even in the very giving of thanks where the reverse seems to take place, in the *extreme of individuality*. Consciousness feels itself therein as this particular individual, and does not let itself be deceived by its own seeming renunciation, for the truth of the matter is that it has *not* renounced itself." Ibid., 134.

27. "Consciousness is aware of itself as *this actual individual* in the animal functions. These are no longer performed naturally and without embarrassment, as matters trifling in themselves which cannot possess any importance or essential significance for Spirit; instead, since it is in them that the enemy reveals himself in his characteristic shape, they are rather the object of serious endeavour, and become precisely matters of the utmost importance. This enemy, however, renews himself in his defeat, and consciousness, in fixing its attention on him, far from freeing itself from him, really remains forever in contact with him, and forever sees itself as defiled." Ibid., 135–36.

28. Ibid.

29. In his first book, Girard often uses a Hegelian vocabulary. It is a stylistic choice that he will later regret. In the French edition of *Theatre of Envy*, he states: "*Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* uses these elements of language [i.e., master and slave] which are perfectly acceptable as metaphors, but which convey a deceptive tone of Hegelianism to a way of thinking which is not Hegelian at all." ["*Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque recourt à ce langage d'ailleurs parfaitement acceptable dans le registre des métaphores, mais qui donne une fausse couleur d'hégélianisme à une pensée en réalité pas hégélienne du tout*."] See René Girard, *Shakespeare: Les feux de l'envie* (Paris: Grasset et Fasquelle, 1990), 68.

30. In his first book, Girard defines "metaphysical desire" as the ultimate end of triangular desire. It is a desire for the mediator's or model's (only seemingly self-sufficient) being. "Metaphysical desire" rests on a "deviated transcendence" or, to put it in other words, an adulteration of man's desire for God. Starting from *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard will no longer refer to "metaphysical desire." Only in his early writings does Girard presuppose a native quest for transcendence in man.

31. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 97–98.

32. Ibid. 103.

33. Ibid., 99.

34. Ibid., 105.

35. Ibid., 107, 109.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., 53.

38. Ibid., 112.

39. "The Hegelian dialectic is situated in a violent past. It exhausts its last force with the appearance of the nineteenth century and of democracy. The novelistic dialectic on the contrary appears in the post-Napoleonic universe." Ibid., 110.

40. "The Hegelian dialectic rested on physical courage. Whoever has no fear will be the master, whoever is afraid will be the slave. The novelistic dialectic rests on hypocrisy. Violence, far from serving the interests of whoever exerts it, reveals the intensity of his desire; thus it is a sign of slavery. Mathilde's eyes shine with joy when Julien seizes a rapier from the wall of the library. Julien notices her happiness and prudently puts down the weapon whose decorative role is symbolic." Ibid., 112.

41. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), § 432, Zusatz, 159. Emphasis mine.

42. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 111.

43. Ibid., 158.

44. Ibid., 159.

45. Ibid., 53.

46. "But it is clear from what has just been said that *dueling* must definitely not be confused with the fight for recognition that constitutes a necessary moment in the development of the human mind. . . . Although the law of the jungle was elaborated into certain forms, yet its absolute basis was egotism. Consequently, its practice was not a proof of rational freedom and genuinely civic honour, but rather a proof of brutality and often of the shamelessness of a mentality claiming outward honour, despite its depravity." Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, § 432, Zusatz, 159.

47. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 179.

48. René Girard, *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire*, ed. Mark R. Anspach (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 85.

49. Ibid., 86. Emphasis mine. In this quote, Girard implies that although Hegel's idea of the struggle for recognition was extremely close to the discovery of the scapegoat mechanism, his philosophy nonetheless ends up adopting the point of view of mythology. The real violence of collective murder is hidden through the vocabulary of German idealism. According to Girard, Aufhebung ("sublation") and the negative are conceptual categories bearing a strong resemblance to the language of archaic myths. Either way, we are dealing with discourses concealing the actual extent of human violence. It is worth mentioning that Raymund Schwager offered important insights about the mythological aspects of Hegel's philosophy. See Raymund Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats*? (New York: Gracewing, 2000), 37–40.

50. Girard already introduced this idea in a previous paper published in 1965: "The logic of desire must be distinguished from the logic of ideas. Two contradictory ideas are always, of course, two different ideas. By contrast, for two desires to oppose and to contradict one another, they must be identical." See Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, 28.

51. As noticed by Girard, "any demand of reciprocal recognition leads to reciprocal violence." See ibid., 86.

52. Ibid.

53. "From within the system, only differences are perceived; from without, the antagonists all seem alike. From inside, sameness is not visible; from outside, differences cannot be seen." René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 159.

54. Ibid., 160.

55. "Under the heading *monstrous double*, we shall group all the hallucinatory phenomena provoked at the height of the crisis by unrecognized reciprocity." Ibid., 164. Girard's theory of the monstrous doubles is not psychological; it is rather accurately deduced from the interplay between the logic of concepts and logic of desire. I therefore contend that this theory should count as a philosophical argument against Hegel.

56. Ibid., 153–54.

57. Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, 51.

58. Ibid., 52. Emphasis mine.

59. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 32.

60. Ibid., 64.

61. Ibid., 32.

62. It is worth mentioning that Girard had already formulated this critique years before *Battling to the End* during his correspondence with Raymund Schwager. See the following excerpt from a 1976 letter that Girard addressed to Schwager: "I believe that, scientifically speaking, we have to acknowledge that human mimetic rivalry becomes so intense that the "dominance patterns" of the animal kingdom, which represent a compromise solution [*résultant d'un compromis*], are no longer possible. Hence, the crisis and transition to symbolic forms of culture begins with the surrogate victim, which I conceive as the origin of symbolicity and the source of hominization. *So it is possible that murder and human intelligence can be linked, but not as described by Hegel*." Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, Joel Hodge, and Mathias Moosbruggerer, eds., *René Girard and Raymund Schwager: Correspondence, 1974–1991*, trans. Chris Fleming and Shelah Trefle Hidden (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 28. Emphasis mine. See also Raymund Schwager's remark: "Human beings, however, are passionate. Their battles normally know no self-imposed limits. Hegel did not see this dimension of human aggression. *Instead he understood violence as animal behavior*." (*Must There Be Scapegoats*?, 37. Emphasis mine).

63. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 41.

64. Ibid., 31.

65. As concisely and ironically observed by Girard: "It is obvious that, for there to be recognition, the master, who makes me exist simply by looking at me, must not be killed!" See ibid.

66. Raymond Aron, *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz*, vol. 1, *L'âge européen* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 360–71.

67. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 32.

68. Even though I can only mention this controversy in passing, it is worth mentioning that Youri Cormier recently challenged Aron's standpoint on Clausewitz and Hegel. Further research on Girard and Hegel will certainly have to take Cormier's work into account. See Youri Cormier, *War as Paradox: Clausewitz and Hegel on Fighting Doctrines and Ethics* (Kingston, ON: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2016).

69. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 77.

70. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 10.

71. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 324, Addition, 362.

72. Steven B. Smith, "Hegel's Views on War, the State, and International Relations," *American Political Science Review* 77, no. 3 (1983): 629.

73. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 33.

74. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 114.

75. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 33.

76. Ibid., 28.

77. Ibid., 32–33.

78. Ibid., 30.

79. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 333, 368. Emphasis mine.

80. As a matter of fact, Hegel confidently relies on the traditional *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* criteria. Regarding the internal limits to international wars, he affirms: "The fact that states

reciprocally recognize each other as such remains, *even in war*—as the condition of rightlessness, force, and contingency—*a bond* whereby they retain their validity for each other in their being in and for themselves, so that even in wartime, the determination of war is that of something which ought to come to an end." Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 338, 370.

81. Ibid., § 324, 361.

82. "The higher significance of war is that, through its agency (as I have put it on another occasion), 'the ethical health of nations [*Völker*] is preserved in their indifference towards the permanence of finite determinacies, just as the movement of the winds preserves the sea from that stagnation which a lasting calm would produce—a stagnation which a lasting, not to say perpetual, peace would also produce among nations.'" Ibid., § 324, 361.

83. Steven B. Smith, "Hegel's Views on War, the State, and International Relations": 629.

84. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 32. The denial of biology indicates that the primordial struggle for recognition is revived through modern war.

85. Ibid., 32. Although he does not directly mention it, I believe that Girard refers to the following passage of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*: "The principle of the modern world—*thought* and the universal—has given a higher form [*Gestalt*] to valour, in that its expression seems to be more mechanical and not so much the deed of a *particular* person as that of a *member* of a whole." Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 328, 365.

86. "This is why the principle of thought has invented the *gun*, and this invention, which did not come about by chance, has turned the purely personal form of valour into a more abstract form." Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 328, 365.

87. Hegel already formulated this idea in his Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805–1806): "The end is the maintenance of the totality, against the enemy who is out to destroy it. *This externalization must have this same abstract form, must be without individuality—death, coldly received and given, not in ongoing battle where the individual has his eye on his opponent and kills him with direct hatred; rather, death emptily given and received, impersonal in the gunsmoke*." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit*, trans. Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 171.

88. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 10.

89. Ibid., 33.

90. Ibid., 39.

91. Ibid., 32–33.

92. See Paul Dumouchel and Andreas Wilmes, "René Girard and Philosophy: An Interview with Paul Dumouchel," *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1 (2017): 9, http://dx.doi.org/10.22618/TP.PJCV.20171.1.95003.

93. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 28.

94. Pablo Diego Bubbio, "Sacrifice in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, no. 4 (2012): 797–815. Anselm Tilman Ramelow, "Sacrifice in Hegel and Girard," in *Mimetic Theory and World Religions*, ed. Wolfgang Palaver and Richard Schenk (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018), 13–62.

95. Ibid., 37.

96. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 44.

97. Ibid., 46.

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling

Tania Checchi

ASSESSING SCHELLING'S PRESENCE IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY IS no easy task. "Protean" was an early tag attached to his thought, and its aptness warns us of the considerable difficulty of encompassing a philosophical trajectory that reaped its first successes even before Hegel's and then lasted almost twenty years after the death of his erstwhile friend and rival. Starting with a brilliant new point of departure for post-Kantian metaphysics that made art the center of his idealism and ending with a melancholy and vast meditation on Revelation and mythology, Schelling's philosophy attempted once and again to open up new spaces for embracing in a unitary but nuanced way all aspects of existence that bear directly in our finitude, its sadness and vulnerability, and the possibility of surpassing such limits. That is why his vast learning, which included astronomy and medicine, an incomparable mastery of languages, and a never-ending curiosity, made of him an authentic polymath who tirelessly began his system anew in order to include not only a philosophical a posteriori assessment of the so-called hard sciences (what many of his contemporaries did in an exclusively epistemological way) but an authentic scientific impulse that brought poetry into the realm of physics. This ambition may have rendered many of his attempts laughable to some of his colleagues at the time—not that he was exempt from these rivalries as he himself mocked Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles[1]—but the relevance of his project as a whole (aside from some particular instances that could be challenged by contemporary science) cannot be denied. Inasmuch as his thought was understood in the mainstream history of philosophy as the merely "objective" counterpart to

Fichte's "subjective" idealism—a mere stage on the way to Hegel—what was not taken into account was the absolutely novel way in which a notion like the *unconscious* as *dark ground* qualifies our relationship to the whole of reality, including our conflicting liaisons with others, and not only to the inaccessible strata of our psyche. That is why I believe his philosophical and vital trajectory should be understood in Girardian terms: both as a precursor that recognized the paradoxical and adverse nature of desire and as one whose intuitions concerning the continuity and ruptures in the history of religion can be fruitfully read through the lens of mimetic theory. If not understood this way, his project can be easily mistaken, in the best case scenario, for a reiteration of the romantic reduction of Christianity to myth, and particularly Greek myth—as it so happened to Hölderlin's lamentation over the eclipse of the transcendent[2]—or, in the worst, for a nightmarish theosophy. Neither Girard nor Schelling ever took the problem of evil for granted, as many of their contemporaries did, be it in a sort of asceptic anthropology, in the first case, or in a dialectical philosophy in the latter. Accounting for the origin of violence was not for neither of these two thinkers an easy way out into theodicy. They both intended to remain grounded on human experience and human responsibility. That is why, for the better part of his career, Schelling understood evil not as a necessary step in a progression toward the best or even as a privation, but as a dislocation or usurpation of an obscure ground that is not in itself evil but is a fecund condition of possibility for different outcomes—just as mimesis works for Girard. Thus, Schelling's later writings constitute a formidable effort to not cede the last word to a philosophy of dialectical triumphalism that doesn't concern itself with the problem of evil and its relation to freedom as a problem of lived actuality that no formal system could ever master. That is why last century's explicit overturning of the traditional hierarchy of philosophical thought, that is, the recognition of the supremacy of good over truth,[3] was already at work in what he entitled lately in his life "positive philosophy," the necessary supplement and culmination of any supposedly closed system of dialectical or "negative" thought. Thus, it should not be difficult to see how his preoccupation with all that resists conceptualization, what Emil Fackenheim calls "brute facticity,"[4] still inhabits current philosophical and cultural debates and anxieties, even if the prevailing modes in which they are posed do not tolerate Schelling's kind of thought just as they try to dismiss Girard's critical account.

If contemporary philosophers are somehow still struggling to catch up with some of Schelling's most groundbreaking intuitions, what kind of rapprochement can we attempt to his thought and that of René Girard? Now, for those familiar with mimetic theory, it is a known fact that the experience of conversion is one of the structuring principles in Girard's thought. Nevertheless, no morphology of conversion was ever put forward by Girard. We can only retrace his steps and intuit a sort of existential methodology behind his attempts to describe its process and its fruits all throughout his oeuvre. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, published in 1961, traces for the first time in a long-sustained effort this fundamental experience in the likes of Proust, Stendhal, and Dostoevsky, among others. The original title of that text embodies its whole trajectory: *Mensonge romantique and verité romanesque* (Romantic lie and novelistic truth). For Girard, romanticism accomplishes the paroxysm of the modern individual: all of reality becomes the scenario for the protagonist's quest not for authenticity as such—that is, arrogantly enough, already a given—but for the reaffirmation of his absolute autonomy and originality. Characteristics that can be found in the constant mockery of the romantic circle to which Schelling and Hölderlin belonged and the alternating elevation and dejection to which many found themselves subjected to according to the whims of what they presumed were the "autonomous others."[5] The authors studied by Girard began this quest but were blindsided by what Girard designates as the novelistic experience: the gradual realization of our indebtedness to the other's desire and the consequent inversion of the self's precedence. In an essay first published in 1965 and now reprinted in the collection *Oedipus Unbound*, Girard summarizes this as follows: "The hero embodies the novelist's chimera, his desire. But he initially embodies it as if it were truth. In the novelistic masterpiece, he embodies it as the chimera that it is. The transition from the reflected illusion to the represented illusion demands an identification with the wicked Other, which implies death. The novelist succeeds in experiencing this death in the work, through the intermediary of a hero who is sick, wounded, mutilated, dying."[6]

So, one of our guiding questions here is whether this same experience can be detected in Schelling's intellectual and vital trajectory. Girard did not put much trust in philosophy's adequacy for achieving this task, but he did not disqualify it entirely. He constantly traced back much of his insights to important names in the history of thought. In outlining in the opening

paragraphs Schelling's philosophical career, I already underscored important shifts in his path. From the brilliant inaugural figure of German idealism to the wise and relentless adversary of dialectical thinking passing through the struggling philosopher immersed in what Girard would call aesthetic despair.[7] In his exemplary book entitled *The God Within: Kant, Schelling, and Historicity*, Emil Fackenheim compares two extant pictures of Schelling: The painting of the young professor who precociously harvested the first fruits of idealism's success and a photograph of the philosopher in his old age. Or, as Fackenheim writes, "What the aged Schelling sees we can see in his eyes."[8] Far from trying to find the traces of the kind of conversion Girard talks about in Schelling's biography—his life was unfortunately traversed with sorrow, turning him finally into the ailing and pierced hero—I would like to show how this process can be read in especially important milestones in his intellectual research, one marked, I believe, with fundamental insights that converge with some of the main points of Girard's mimetic theory.[9]

In order to do this, I would like to pose three basic lines that could be drawn connecting Schelling's and Girard's thought, not in the way of a genealogy or an exhaustive exposition of the possible influences the former may have had in the latter via Emmanuel Levinas, for instance, but in the really simple way in which a gestalt results from the recognition of common features that can give way to new and fruitful figures for the better assessment of the first ones, opening up the possibility of recognizing the common realms of meaning in which both authors move regarding the problem of mythology and religion and its bearing on our own very thought and existence. This strikes us as urgent in this age in which both instances are generally considered outmoded or even superseded leaving us, as Girard has warned us, facing an unprecedented risk. Let us say (using a Schellingian formulation later exploited by Martin Heidegger) that the deep consonance of both Schelling's and Girard's thoughts' affective tonalities may authorize us to highlight their analogies and affinities without recourse to a never-ending collection of historical data. This, of course, doesn't exempt us from contextualizing up to a certain point the emergence of Schelling's ideas that may prove useful to support and clarify Girard's reading of mythology and desire through the lens of his mimetic theory. But I will try to accomplish this precisely as I trace the following three lines of enquiry: mythology as the effective content of all art, the problem of evil

and the emergence of polytheism, and Revelation as a progressive exit from mythology.

Very early in his philosophy, Schelling tried to systematically harness his intuition of mythology as the truly operative content of art in order to understand the independent existence of polytheism's gods. For the German philosopher as well as for Girard, mythology is not the product of any form of fanciful thinking. According to Schelling, ancient people's original identity was forged in the crucible of myth and its artistic productions, in a sphere with its own self-sustaining logic—a sphere that cannot be co-opted by any individual or group in power as many Enlightenment thinkers presumed. For Girard, the stories consecrated in myth give the original communities their first sense of belonging, of there being an "inside" with which they identify and a violent "outside" inhabited by transcendent dangers. Thus, the sacred, in its all-encompassing cultural dynamic, is understood by both authors as a realm of utmost pragmatic reality—art being for a young Schelling the superior cultural activity that informs mythology in its identity-giving function and understanding of the law as divinely personal. For both authors, as we shall see, the sacred is a world-forming realm, best recognized in the mythological content of art, and condemned to perish and establish itself again and again in response to successive crisis.

Second is the problem of evil and the emergence of polytheism as inversion of *ground* and *logos* along with desire's role in this process. In what might be called Schelling's middle period, we find the first real difficulties he encountered when faced with the impossibility of integrating evil in any comprehensive system, even as a negative reality needed to accomplish the Absolute. What he proposes here is of eminent interest from a Girardian point of view inasmuch as he links the conflicting aspects of desire with violence and its role in the emergence of early religious configurations. Furthermore, Schelling provides us with a vocabulary of desire and its different traits that can be of much use to mimetic theory's deepening analysis of imitative behavior and the troubled yearnings it produces. As I will try to show, Schelling shares with Girard the insight into the mechanism that exits a crisis by a god positing activity that has sacrificial figures at its center.

Third is Revelation as a progressive exit from mythology. Schelling as well as Girard faced the problem of understanding and integrating in the

saintly history of Revelation an account of ancient religion, a polytheism marked by the violent sacred—that is, by a false transcendence born from a desire that rebelliously puts itself forward at all costs—without condemning the tragic humanity situated before Revelation. Both authors' approach is made possible by the adoption of a Christian hermeneutic to reveal the truth about myth. Even if their conclusions are not exactly the same—Schelling detects desire's tendency to usurp the truth and thus its violent character, but not its mimetic nature—the structural affinities of what they bring into light apropos the rapport between desire, the crisis it produces, and its deceitful resolution are certainly worth considering.

Let me begin with some contextual remarks. Even before Kant's death in 1804, his monumental corpus had left subsequent thinkers with the task of either continuing his work along one of the two distinct but legitimate tracks delineated since his first *Critique*—epistemology or morals—or attempting the impossible challenge of bridging what seemed hereupon parallel and irreconcilable paths for philosophy. The master had already attempted this feat in his *Critique of Judgement* and whether he failed or succeeded is still a matter of debate. What he achieved in his late return to natural philosophy in his *Opus Postumum* is only known to the few Kantian experts that dare travel that deep into this unfinished and perplexing work. Nevertheless, his third and last *Critique* made it an imperative for his successors to take heed of the suggestive and eventually transgressive possibilities the newly postulated place of art in his system could offer. In Kant's analysis, the *sublime* applied exclusively to the feeling nature's immeasurable dimension and potency awakens in us, forcing reason to yield what is impossible for the senses and the imagination to present, the closed off realm of the noumenal. For his romantic disciples, what he described as a "negatively pleasurable" experience could be readily transposed into art. Thus, Kant's third *Critique* opened up an unprecedented enthusiasm toward art in the philosophical medium that even today has not entirely dissipated. What a central and fecund role artistic activity would enjoy in the first decades of the 1800s is widely known; its link to some of the most difficult and abstruse of philosophy's queries at the time is not.[10]

In view of Kant's task incompleteness, various routes were taken, many disjointedly epistemological or moralistic. But what if, a young Schelling asks, there is a human endeavor that is capable of accomplishing what knowledge and morals alone cannot? His *System of Transcendental*

Idealism of 1800 already gives us a strong answer in this regard. In this groundbreaking work, Schelling turns the *ego* or *self* that in Fichtean idealism was confronted with a *non-self* or nature—ultimately dependent on that first and primordial self—into an *ego* wholly immersed in nature as its pre-condition, as its authentic *pre-self*—a first intuition of what later would become the *ground* of reality as desire rooted in nature. He can only attain this inversion—beginning with the unconscious and not consciousness—if the ego in question is not merely a finite human ego, but if the Absolute itself and its emergence from nature is a whole theophanic process. This alteration to the transcendental cartography marks one of his most original contributions to later philosophy, for it brings about a shift still at work in contemporary philosophical enquiries into nonhuman realms—what Levinas would later call the *elemental*, for example or Merleau-Ponty the *chiasmic*.[11] But to stop this delving into the Absolute's most profound and unconscious roots from becoming an abstraction, philosophy had to find a concrete verification of its ideal principles. This could only be found, according to Schelling, in art, philosophy's *organon* hereafter;[12] the importance of this fact in mimetic theory can hardly be exaggerated, inasmuch as both Schelling and Girard effectively found the thread for their major contributions in the lessons imparted by art, even if the youthful Schelling's hypertrophy of art was to be overcome later in his trajectory.

Art: The World under the Reign of Myth

Thus, it will be art considered by Schelling as a new sort of religion that will breach the final impasses inherited from Kant. The young thinker was convinced that art's internal working's exposition would show us how the conflict between the infinite and the finite,[13] between the unconscious and the conscious, and between necessity and freedom that arises in all human undertakings, comes to a satisfactory conclusion in artistic production.[14] Such is the grandeur of the coming to be of art that, Schelling tells us, if it had happened just once, we would have still been convinced of its absolute reality, which harmoniously combines the conscious freedom of moral action and the experience of an inner otherness, of the unconscious necessity of nature.[15]

Up to this point in our exposition, Schelling's abstract endeavors and the tasks he inherited from his formidable teachers seem to bear little in common with René Girard's mimetic theory. But here we find our first link. Art, both for Schelling and Girard, bears a revelatory nature inasmuch as it can let us see what science discounts and modern morality is unaware of. Now, what kind of revelation each of them could expect art to yield can be thought of as completely or even symmetrically opposed, at least, at first glance. But once immersed in Schelling's deployment of art's constitutive nature and products, we'll begin to see how his conception of art and mythology can illuminate both mimetic theory's critique of myth and its acknowledgement of myth's culture generating aspects. Also, if it seems I'm taking too long in some of the more conceptual aspects of his proposal, I do it to emphasize the enthusiasm and confidence the young Schelling still has in his systematizing skills. Soon enough, it will not be so. Let us return then to the work, which, once situated in the kind of philosophical problems Schelling was dealing with, will offer us the first materials for our trade of ideas with René Girard's thought.

In his lectures for the academic year in Jena of 1802–1803, posthumously published by his son as *The Philosophy of Art*, Schelling states from the very beginning that his will not be a theory of art but a philosophy of art. This entails not an empirical criticism of particular works of art, however meritory they might be, but a completely speculative enterprise, which will take its lead not from what is considered art in a vulgar sense, that which merely pleases, but from art as an authentic *tool of the gods*.[16] Now, what for Schelling qualifies as speculative is not just a disembodied or formal consideration of art in abstract terms. He looks to put forward its historical conditions.[17]

Hence, he will have to follow the historical evolution of art inasmuch as this process exhibits the spiritual conditions of its production and goals. His exposition will proceed according to the pattern that Schelling employs in his systematic display of different realms—nature, physics, art, and thought—as an unfolding of different series that mutually complement and forward one another.[18] A threefold distinction, then, will apply throughout: When what is ideal (infinite) fails, like science, to incorporate the finite, what we have is *schematic*; when what is real (finite) points to but fails to reach the infinite, like morality, what we have is *allegorical*. The form of existence that synthetizes both the finite and the infinite is the *symbolical*.[19] This

characterization of art may seem at odds with Girard's sober realism, but it may be very helpful if it is understood that it is what the first emergence of human thought is grappling with and figuring out in myth—not as a merely speculative endeavor as Levi-Strauss supposed but as a first encounter with reality—once gods appeared and violence was kept at a safe distance.

What mainly interests us is what Schelling designates as the ideal series of art.[20] Its whole display takes place in the realm of the symbolic par excellence: the word. Sound, inflection, and accent reveal for him the particular in language, its embodiment. The conceptual meaning of words bears its universal aspect. Now, to expound the conflicting dualities that should be resolved in art as he anticipated, Schelling situates the real in the series in lyrical poetry, particular inasmuch as it expresses the inner life of the poet in which freedom and necessity coincide in the movement of emotion. The ideal will take place in epic poetry, universal in form because the story is heard by the poet as if located in the Absolute. What predominates here is the identity of freedom and necessity without conflict but located in the external, in the objective and radiant world of Homer, for example; hence, the epic's indifference toward time.[21] Again, this understanding of the different strands of poetry can help us understand from what point of view is the sacred formulated in the earliest forms of art whose content is directly myth.

The place of the author in these three types of *poesy* as Schelling calls them gives us a further insight into what is at stake here in our line of inquiry concerning the possibility of a novelistic experience in his exploration of the place of art and mythology in the realm of human endeavors, perhaps not in his first approach but definitely in his overall work. In the case of the lyrical poem, it's all about the self and his affective transformations, so there is no distance between the protagonist and the author. No critical interval is allowed here. In epic poetry, by contrast, the author is completely outside the action he relates and thus is indifferent, like a god, beyond morality, as Schiller aspired to be. "Everything is summarized in the fact that poesy or the poet floats above it all like a higher being touched by nothing. . . . The poet himself . . . thereby becomes a god and the most perfect image of the divine nature."[22]

And gods in the epic are not moral, Schelling points out, because morality has to do with disunion, and it only falls on us, mortal beings, to take up the finite to the infinite in action.[23] Now, from a Girardian point of

view, prefigured here by Schelling, their exemption from the law is linked to their being coetaneous with the *emergence* of the law.[24] Schelling affirms in a radical manner that gods do not "mean" or "represent" anything, they are *tautegorical*; they "are" what they embody. Sovereignty only appears in the world *as* Zeus, not before. The various gods' independent existence relies on this fact: "Accordingly, they necessarily constitute a world in their own turn collectively, one in which everything together is mutually determined, an organic whole, a totality, a world."[25]

Here we find a clear affinity to Girard's view on the matter of the concrete function gods and religiosity exercise in archaic societies as organizing principles, even if in this phase of his thought Schelling is not yet aware of the real reason behind this fact.[26] Nevertheless, in declaring the independent existence of gods from the realm of fantasy, Schelling puts forward the idea that, contrary to what a naive euhemerism would affirm, gods are not merely historically important figures now clothed in legend—a facile understanding of Girard would fall into this mistake. They constitute the appearance of a whole new reality—the sacred—in which the entire meaning of an emergent human order is at stake, just as Girard affirms. Furthermore, epic's beginning and end are for Schelling absolute even though they take the form of chance, for example, the *Iliad*'s dealing with Achilles's anger and not with the whole war. This appearance of arbitrariness to someone looking in from the outside, Schelling explains, is due to what he had stated earlier in his § 42 about the nature of mythology as being the product of a collectivity behaving itself as an individual[27]—not merely as a composite of individuals—and thus producing the identity of a whole people in a necessary manner that is not understood externally, particularly from the point of view of modernity. "In Greek mythology nature has presented us with such a work of one common formative impulse that has been extended to include an entire collectivity. The counterculture to the Greek—modernity—displays nothing of this sort. . . . Hence Greek mythology is not only infinitely significant in and for itself but also because in its inception it is the work of a collectivity that is simultaneously an individual; it is the work of a god."[28]

In an eerily similar vein, Girard tells us the following about the classical opposition between necessity and free action embodied in Greek thought: "Everything the gods do is perfect because it is unanimous. Freedom and

constraint are bound inextricably by their subordination to the mimetic power of the united gods."[29] Even if the young Schelling could not see the violence inherent to this collectivity acting as one, he clearly envisions that unanimity (a universal singular) has to be at work to produce the divine just as a deity would, hence its moral indifference toward all events contained in the epic. As Girard aptly puts it in his book on Job, "*vox populi, vox dei*."[30] Schelling even goes to the length of positing a "second world," absolutely objective, inasmuch as it can't be described as arbitrary or capricious and is thus the basis for the construction of a whole system of meaning beyond nature—the sacred as the origin of everything symbolic as Girard would put it. Schelling, as well as Girard, locates here the key to the emergence of language and culture, mythology being the sole content of art and thought from its emergence onward. That we begin with stories and rites and not with obscurely grasped concepts, as Girard affirms when he opposes structuralism's fixation with intellectual processes,[31] is something that will dawn on Schelling not so late in his career and here we find the first intimations of this insight.

Now returning to Schelling's exposition of the literary arts, we locate the symbolic accent of the series in tragedy, of course. In Attic drama, the dormant identity of epic and the closed off difference of the lyrical poem become fate and moral freedom respectively. How their opposition is superseded gives us an inkling of the way in which Schelling's reading of tragedy can converge with that of Girard. First of all, regarding the position of the author, immanent in the lyric and external in the epic, we find the author of drama in an intermediate position. He identifies himself with the hero, as Aristotle puts it, through terror and pity, in the former's struggle to liberate himself from the objective power, but he still has to witness fate's assault on the protagonist. The solution is precisely that the narrative should be *performed*. Only thus the opposition between necessity and freedom can be exposed. The hero is able to speak freely and make his case, but necessity cannot be absolutely overcome unless we risk total anarchy.[32] For Schelling mere external calamity does not constitute a tragic fate. Contrary to Aristotelian tradition, he states that tragedy is not the result of error or stubbornness, the famous *hamartia*, but of a willingly accepted guilt: "This is the highest possible misfortune: by fate to become guilty without genuine guilt."[33]

In his book *To Mend the World*, when dealing with the issue of the German's people responsibility for the Holocaust, Emil Fackenheim recognizes his indebtedness to Schelling's *Philosophy of Art* for the notion of a subject that can be subjectively innocent and objectively guilty at the same time.[34] Leaving aside the question of Oedipus's ultimate innocence with respect to Laius's death, on which all Girardians agree, here we have a glimpse into the possibility of the victim's doom not being his or her direct fault, but instead due to his or her immersion in a vengeful order considered eminently real. That is why for Schelling the contradiction between freedom and necessity is all the more devastating in tragedy. It is "fate" the one who makes the "guilty" party a transgressor, not his deliberate or even his unknowing actions. But if in the last instance, the actual content of the tragedian's art comes from a story told and heard in *eternity* by a collectivity acting as one, the pull of fate comes precisely from that communion and *unanimity*. It is no wonder then that for Schelling it is the presence of the chorus, that sine qua non element of tragedy, that transforms the action into necessity,[35] for even "this guiltlessness does not remove the punishment."[36] In the last instance, it is all about the relation of the one and the many,[37] represented by the protagonist who is to suffer collective violence and the chorus. The only freedom granted in this case is that the *guiltless guilty* person accepts punishment voluntarily, contributing to the unanimity of the gods and the mimetic pull that engenders them. The fact that the tragedian allows this paradox—highlighted by Schelling—to come into light, is what makes it possible for Girard to consider tragedy a veritable "exegesis of the myth, the most profound that we possess."[38] And the place that, with regard to the story he is telling, the tragic author occupies, as an intermediate between the complete subjective immersion and the extreme externality of lyrical and epic poetry respectively, is what makes all of this possible according to Schelling. Thus, I believe that Schelling's assessment of the different positions of the narrator or author can be usefully employed to better understand the unique conditions that enable the tragedian to work out the exegesis for which he is commended by Girard. That's why for the French thinker, catharsis, always attained at the expense of the hero, is "as far removed as possible from the experience of [a] creator" who can no longer condone it as it happened in the epic and lyrical strands of poetry.[39] Thus, even under the enchantment of the beauty

of this perfect tragic equilibrium, as he calls it, Schelling insightfully recognized that while the world of the epic is a unity, in tragedy gods and men are divided and a fissure begins to insinuate itself.[40]

Nevertheless, Schelling concedes, drama's perfect form pertains only to ancient art. The advent of Christianity makes this serene unity impossible. Inasmuch as it was the result of the unanimous action of the sacred, its immutable sphere was pierced by a transcendence free from the violence of archaic fate. Divinity, once immanent in the pagan world, must be sought now elsewhere and only fragments of the former cosmos are our starting point. Schelling believes, thus, that only a new mythology can recompose the lost order, so he explores the ones he finds in Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, etc. However, Christianity doesn't allow for the notion of innocent guilt and its consequences to stand—Girard has shown us why the gradual recognition, made possible by Christian Revelation, of the arbitrariness of collective violence shifts our cultural allegiance toward the unfortunate victim whose death once produced the sacred. And it is to Schelling's credit that he clearly saw that it was not the emphasis on the individual that made modernity possible, as many romantics thought, but the advent of Christian belief. He also understood and highlighted the place of privilege that in this different world the new way of storytelling embodied in the novel would occupy: Whereas ancient poetry related history as such, the novel can only tell stories—fragments of this once ordered world—and endeavor to make sense of the new one only in this disjointed manner. For Girard, it is precisely this quality of the novel, no longer harnessed by the ancient amor fati, that makes it possible to unveil the traps of desire formerly disguised as destiny. Against the idea of an inexorable destiny that awaits the romantic or tragic hero, Girard states that through novelistic revelation, we come to recognize that "the ambitious man is not persecuted by blind fate; it is the dialectic of pride and shame which is always present even at the height of glory. [41]

Ground and Existence: Evil as Disordered Desire

Now, it is time to deal with what could be considered the mature Schelling's take on the problem of evil and suffering. These early intuitions about art, revelation, and mythology that I just presented will not be completely

abandoned by Schelling even after he gives up on his absolute idealism not many years after his lessons on the philosophy of art. But it should be stressed that when they appear afterward, they will not do so in the same manner. Many of Schelling's commentators like to think of clean breaks that make it easier to identify clear periods in his philosophical trajectory, but there are many constant themes that, to put it mildly, torment him throughout—thus his self-imposed periods of silence. Finitude and evil are two of them, both being the main reason for his various "failed" attempts to systematize his thought inasmuch as his search for unity wasn't indifferent to life's precarious nature.[42] Perhaps he was entering timidly and for the first time the path so precociously recognized and adopted by his former friend, Hölderlin, a route immersed in a melancholy search for a lost unity so ardently desired.[43] So in his *Philosophical Investigations on the Nature of Human Freedom*, published in 1809, he plunged himself into the problem of radical evil and theodicy. Kant had been accused by many of his admirers of clinging to the outmoded notion of original sin in his approach to this problem. Schelling clearly saw that it needed to be readdressed in order to save freedom from formal emptiness. In mimetic theory, the notion of original sin as describing the condition of a fallen humanity that arises from collective violence is something to take very much into account, especially when it is tackled in relation to desire as Schelling does. In this complex and sometimes perplexing book, Schelling deals head on with the reality of evil and the impasses former attempts of theodicy faced. Here he conceives evil not as a privation or as a mathematical problem of optimization, but as an inversion or perversion of principles whose equilibrium results in life itself and the Revelation of God.

Schelling's distinction of two ultimate metaphysical principles, *existence* and *ground*, palpably derived from his philosophy of nature, make it possible for him to display an all-encompassing process that recalls former mystical doctrines, like Isaac Luria's self-contraction of God or *tzim tzum*,[44] or Jacob Boehme's *craving*.[45] Both Schelling and these authors try to account for the existence of evil situating it in an original realm without granting it any substantive reality or making God suspect. For a theory that, like Girard's, tries to show how violence, formerly attributed to God, is only a human affair, Schelling's attempt to account for it exempting God from being its cause could be used as a fruitful example of one of its main goals. For the aforementioned mystics, God's self-limiting gesture when creating a

free being gives rise to the possibility of evil. Concrete evil is for Schelling then the result of a disarray between the principles that constitute God's nature. While *existence* is embodied in light and Revelation, being equivalent to the Word, *ground* is the necessary dark milieu which gives the former weight and prevents it from dissipating. What in God is impossible —the fearsome prospect that the obscure *ground* prevails—in human beings is a constant risk: "The same unity that is inseverable in God must therefore be severable in man—and this is the possibility of good and evil."[46]

One may ask here, how can Girard possibly fit in this theosophic scene? Time and again, Girard stated that his was a theory not of God but of man, that is, a religious anthropology that deals with the causes of human violence inasmuch it can no longer be attributed to a transcendent principle. Even though Schelling seems to give into philosophy's constant temptation —according to Levinas, theosophy—what his project tried to do from this moment on and up to his last days is to uncover the dynamism that gives birth *both* to evil as violence and to Revelation, two of Girard's main preoccupations. And desire will be for both authors the crux of the matter. This "darkness of the depths" that is *ground* is characterized by Schelling as a sort of anarchic *Senhsucht* or yearning that finds its true realization in its mingling with the *Word*'s reflexive and light-giving character. However, this yearning is a sort of centralizing force that is constantly "striving back into itself."[47] This process rooted in God gradually produces everything that exists, but, in mankind, its disarray ends up by producing radical evil. So, we come down to the kind of anthropological problem that Girard intended to tackle. According to Schelling, man's will is deep-seated in God's *ground*, that is, in this centripetal force of self-containment that expresses itself in nature where it constitutes the bond of "forces in the quiet of the depths." But when this deep bond leaves this *centrum* trying to uphold the particular, his own will, over the universal—God's love—then it has opted for evil. Eric Gans, one of Girard's foremost disciples, has worded the balance that must be kept in a very similar way as the relation of center to periphery. "Thus my scene of homogenesis begins not with the *sparagmos* of the unconsciously chosen scapegoat/victim but with its intentional designation by a *sign*, which functions to defer violence not out of mere physical exhaustion but through the creation of a new, spiritual center around which this sign is reciprocally exchanged."[48]

Schelling's description of the disruption of this arrangement is plagued by a vocabulary of desire that provides us with an important repertoire of desire's traits that should be taken into account by mimetic theory: *Sehnsucht* (longing), *Sucht* (addiction), *Schwermut* (heavy-heartedness), *Schärfe des Lebens* (life's intensity or keenness).[49] His whole treatise on freedom is an engaging exploration of the semantic and performative fields of desire that flesh out an otherwise formal consideration of freedom. In the following phrase, Schelling offers us a clear statement of purpose and a terse diagnosis of the problem idealism has had with anything and everything that resists proper intellectualization, that is, incarnated desire not as a dialectical motor but as a disruptive force that feeds on itself and hides behind its awe-inducing products: "We are speaking of the essence of yearning, considered in and for itself, that likely must be brought into view, although it has long been repressed by the higher things that have arisen out of it."[50]

Now, for Schelling, this longing per se involves no wickedness at all, desire's original goal being God's love, but this unruly dynamism may in mankind turn toward itself in an ever-recurring fashion. That is precisely when evil becomes an active and even an angry presence in the world.[51] Schelling is thus exploring the conflicting aspects of desire that can be very easily and violently deployed in our midst. The real danger comes when man, who is *spirit*, can put all of freedom's resources to the service of this unhinged yearning, that "following a dark uncertain law is incapable of constructing for itself anything enduring."[52] So that's why, to put it in Girard's vocabulary, desire can only fashion an illusory world that responds to its iterative obsession. The consequences, from a Girardian point of view, are hardly unexpected: "In this way one is likely able to explain the Platonic phrase that evil comes "from ancient nature." For all evil strives back into chaos, that is, back into that state in which the initial centrum had not yet being subordinated to the light and is a welling up in the centrum of a yearning still without understanding."[53]

Thus, Schelling describes a situation in which desire is exacerbated and its original destination toward expression and the Other is redirected toward its bearer. Just as the Aztec god of the moon behaves in the myth related to us by Girard: "He wants to be without a rival, the first among them, one who acts as a model for others without having a model himself. This is

hubris, so exaggerated a form of mimetic desire that he claims to be beyond all mimesis, to want no other model than himself."[54] This indivisible remainder as Schelling calls it and, which is read by the likes of Slavoj Žižek sometimes as the Freudian death instinct, sometimes as the circling of Lacan's objet petit a,[55] could be harnessed without forcing the argument in a mimetic fashion. The problem of desire, according to Girard, is not its compulsive search for an original lost object like psychoanalysis tends to put it but precisely the opposite; it has no object: "Men are strangers to their desires; children don't know how to desire and must be taught."[56] In the beginning, desire has no clear goal, it is lost, it doesn't know what it desires or should desire. The whole of mimetic theory is built upon this anthropological feature: we are beings of desire, but "our" desire can hardly be called our own. For Heidegger, the key idea of Schelling's treatise is that instead of conceiving freedom as a property of the subject, the latter is converted into a property of the former.[57] I'd like to propose another reading, a Girardian one. While freedom is the ostensible theme of the *Philosophical Investigations*, its undercurrent deals with the exploration of *Senhsucht*'s dynamism. Freedom only emerges as the possibility of maintaining or disrupting the balance of ground and existence.[58] Thus, Schelling's key idea here, changing the content and thus the consequences of Heidegger's formulation could be the following: Desire is not the property of the subject; the subject is owned by desire. In *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard responds to Jean-Michel Oughourlian's anxiety about giving desire a false identity: "If desire is the same for all of us, and if it is the key to the system of relationships, there is no reason not to make it the real "subject" of the structure—a subject that comes back to mimesis in the end. I avoid saying "desiring subject" so as not to give the impression of relapsing into a psychology of the subject."[59]

So, both authors are situated in the same field of vision: That of an original dynamism whose pull tends to fall back into itself, thus engendering closed circuits, like the one that mimesis entails. Desire's only knowledge about objects comes from the other—the Word or expression being the patrimony of intersubjectivity—but if this relationship is not recognized by the desiring ground because the particular will has left what for Schelling is the centrum—an adequate relationship with God—it is left to its own devices and collapse ensues. Let's quote Schelling at length:

> But no sooner than self-will itself moves from the centrum as its place, so does the bond of forces as well; in its stead rules a mere particular will that can no longer bring the forces to unity among themselves as the original will could, and thus must strive to put together or form its own peculiar life from the forces that have moved apart from one another, an indignant host of desires and appetites (since each individual force is also a craving and appetite), this being possible insofar as the first bond of forces, the first ground of nature itself, persists even in evil. But since there can indeed be no true life like that which could exist only in the natural relation, a life emerges which, though individual, is, however, false, a life of mendacity, a growth of restlessness and decay.[60]

The diagnosis here is almost identical for both authors. Girard thinks that desire's strategy of self-preservation gives birth to a distorted image of the world, an illusory counterfeit that systematically denies what could contradict it. This is the point where what he calls the "metaphysical threshold" is surpassed and the real is left behind.[61] Žižek, in his peculiar manner, uses this Schellingian schema to characterize madness's recursivity, but he still misses the point of the *méconnaissance* of the other's place in this scene. Girard gives a lengthy exposition of this dynamic's relation to psychopathology in the chapter on "interdividual psychology" in *Things Hidden*.[62] It is precisely the angry distance from the recognition of the mimetic character of desire, or its "too close for comfort" intuition that sends the sick person into withdrawal from reality. In a similar vein, Schelling too, following Franz Baader, characterized evil as a disease that has "no inherent being" but "announces itself nevertheless as something very real to feeling."[63] Exacerbated mimetic rivalry is described by Girard in almost the same terms in *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*: "The devil's 'quintessential being,' the source from which he draws his lies, is the violent contagion that has no substance to it. The devil has no stable foundation; he has no being at all."[64]

So, we find here the answer to the question of why, if Schelling's dark ground's yearning or desire finds its plenitude in its eventual accordance with the Word's openness, it fights it relentlessly. I will let Girard answer: "Desire relieves its subject of an intolerable knowledge . . . he chooses, in short, to sacrifice his experience and his reason in preference to abandoning his desire."[65]

Revelation and Mythological Cycles

I already mentioned Schelling's daring double goal of establishing a common ground for both evil and Revelation. However paradoxical to traditional philosophy this may sound, for Schelling and also for Girard, this rapprochement has to be accomplished in order to offer a better understanding of both human nature and history. For Girard, the crucial point in the moment of hominization is the resolution of the mimetic crisis in a sacrificial fashion. The virulent collapse of collective exchanges produced by the proliferation of mimetic rivalries finds its only outlet in the polarization of all aggressions toward one arbitrarily selected victim. Her destruction results in the emergence of the first symbol around which the community can reconcile. From this spontaneous outburst and solution, law and ritual ensue: the former proscribing the actions that lead to mimetic exacerbation, the latter repeating, in a controlled environment, the crisis in order to reap its benefits once and again. Thus, history begins, and the first stories told are the distorted accounts of these original persecutions that legitimize collective violence and its results: the deification of victims around which communities organize their entire worldview. As Schelling would put it, sovereignty and Zeus are born at the same time. Now, if all of this process is triggered by desire's blindness to itself, by its deep-seated eagerness to prevail over and against the other, what we have at the origin of history is Schelling's dark ground or unruly yearning giving birth to a process that brings about order from disorder, reason from unreason. Schelling's philosophy of history, barely outlined in the *Investigations*, describes an event thanks to which this anarchic movement, the "turning against each other" of principles, is countered:

> For just as the selfhood in evil had made the light or the world its own and for that reason appears precisely as a higher ground of darkness, so must the word spoken in the world in opposition to evil assume humanity or selfhood and become personal itself. This occurs alone through revelation in the most definitive meaning of the word, which must have the same stages as the first manifestation in nature; namely so that here too the highest summit of revelation is man, but the archetypical (*urbildlich*) and divine man who was with God in the beginning and in whom all other things and man himself are created.[66]

So, the same process that gave birth to history's development as the dark ground's blind striving, must be repeated in an analogous but elevated manner. What misguidedly happened at the beginning must have its revelatory iteration in the Cross. This is precisely what Girard affirms happened in Christ's Passion. The structural similarities between the Gospel

and archaic myths are no coincidence at all. Instead of dismissing the Christian message as a mere myth because of this similarity, both Girard and Schelling highlight it to show how it is precisely this resemblance that helps us uncover and understand the process that started it all. And its cyclical deployment is described by Schelling in this avant la lettre Girardian description of the rise and fall of empires—all the result of the principle active in the ground emerging as world conquering principle: "Because, however, the being of the ground can never generate itself true and complete unity, there comes the time when all this magnificence dissolves and, as if by a terrible sickness, the beautiful body of the previous world collapses and chaos finally emerges once again."[67]

So, Schelling describes world history as the initial ground's attempt to create a world for itself, a creation that, lacking the Word's love, falls each time back into chaos. According to Girard, the precariousness and mendacity of an order attained through sacrifice makes its cyclical character a necessary evil inasmuch as the truth of its bloodthirsty core wasn't recognized. Ancient history was thus a time when "all divine forces of the ground dominated the earth and sat as powerful princes on secure thrones."[68] Now, just prior to Revelation, Schelling describes a time of incantations, superstition, and theurgic formulas, in which what, adopting the Gospels vocabulary, Girard calls *powers and principalities*, and Schelling, *presiding powers*, i.e., the former gods and their structuring capacity, abandon their beneficial aspects and appear as malignant and poisonous spirits: "The attractive force of the ground shows itself ever more determinately; anticipating (*vorempfindend*) the coming light, the ground in advance thrusts all forces out of indecision to meet the light in full conflict."[69]

Here "attraction" should be understood both as the ground's pull toward itself and as the fascination it exerts over us as it fuels our mimetic entanglements. Humanity's servitude to its own desires and its unwillingness to acknowledge its indebtedness to God and neighbor lay siege to the Word that brings light and reveals its deep-seated structures of misguided yearning. In this Schellingian recapitulation of Saint John's Prologue, we can recognize a prefiguration of what Girard offers us in the closing section of *Things Hidden* as a key to rereading the whole of the Bible: by this expulsion, from the beginning, of the authentic Word and its Light, humanity put itself and its demiurgic abilities far from God.

Consequently, the dark ground's resistance to Revelation eventually and brutally brings about the Crucifixion. And though the possibility of salvation is aided, in the midst of this process, by what Schelling calls a "condition of clairvoyance" bestowed upon certain individuals—the prophets—in whose time "divine forces counteract everywhere emergent demonic ones,"[70] Schelling also reinstates his belief that, even outside the Hebraic tradition, this whole process tends toward Revelation: "The very moment when the earth becomes for the second time desolate and empty becomes the moment of the birth for the higher light of the spirit that was in the world from the very beginning, but not comprehended by the darkness acting for itself, and in a yet closed and limited revelation."[71]

A "closed and limited" revelation is thus granted to cultural meanings gestated in the sacrificial process that has given rise to history. In Christ's vindication of history's victims, we find then the Christological kinship of all of them, without justifying the shedding of innocent blood. The "disorder of forces" engaged in awakening self-will is also engaged in propitiating the configuration of individuality, and this, historically speaking, has only emerged in the generative and structuring process of the emissary victim described by Girard. For Michel Serres, *subjectum* is originally the one who "lies beneath the stones."[72] Not surprisingly, at this point, Schelling speaks of a "crisis that ensues in the *turba gentium* (tumult of the peoples) and overflows the foundations of the ancient world."[73] Thus, only in the crisis produced by the coming of the Word can we understand the crisis that once and again and for a long time produced meaning in the world, a meaning though, that has proven much too cruel. Nevertheless, this original ground or yearning is not to be condemned, for it cannot produce evil as such. As Girard puts it, mimetic desire is the basic condition for humanity to emerge and for Revelation to be understood. Only its distortion or reversal can be blamed for evil's emergence; and freedom, however reduced may be its margin of maneuver, is still the turning point: "But if the two principles are in discord, another spirit usurps the place where God should be, namely, the reversed god, the being aroused to actuality by God's Revelation that can never wrest actuality from potency, that, though it never is, yet actually wants to be, and, hence, like the matter of the ancients, cannot be grasped actually by the complete understanding but only through the false imagination which is sin itself."[74]

As we have seen, Schelling's works discussed in this exposition are traversed with his preoccupation with mythology's world-generating aspects and with the place that desire as an obscure but fertile force occupies in this process, an intellectual trajectory definitely akin to that of Girard. In the earlier text discussed we find a young Schelling trying to fit in his system what he first sees as a light-bearing realm: that of the Greek gods and their embodiment in art. In the second, we come to see how he has eventually recognized the violent impulse involved in the gestation of the artistic cosmos of archaic divinities, an impulse that finds its paroxysm in the Cross. Thus, it becomes clearer and clearer how, for Schelling, gods, far from being the mere product of poetic fancy, bear the brunt of culture's generation itself. The birth of gods and the birth of culture is, for both the German thinker and Girard, one and the same and gestating it all is desire's disordered striving. Schelling's next published oeuvre, in 1815, was a brief text on the subject of the *Divinities of Samothrace* that would have been part of the never completed project of *The Ages of the World*. In this text, he explores the links made in the Kabiri cults between the classical Dionysus and the dismembered Zagreus from whose remains humanity was created. Mystery cults always fascinated him because they tried, however equivocally, to pierce the mythological ceiling of the Olympian gods' immanence. Naturally, we needn't say this, they had at their core sacred victims: the abducted Persephone and the violently mutilated Orpheus, among others. Schelling's consciousness of the centrality of sacrificial victims at the origin of all cults is almost as clear as that of Girard. And Schelling's sharp intuition makes him go as far as to identify Zagreus with the Cretan Zeus, that is, the child "protected" by the Kuretes from Kronos in Mount Ida. We should recall here Girard's reading of this myth in *The Scapegoat* as the disguised account of a lynching whose geometrical arrangement of periphery toward center makes it impossible for the victim to escape.[75] Not strangely at all, for Schelling the concealed history of Kabirean names goes from the vulnerability of the son to the *Senhsucht*—once again—of the mother in a two-fold history of destitution.[76] This brief excursion into pagan mysteries was for Schelling a preparation for a larger-scale project that would lead him almost two decades later to his *Historical Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* and his monumental *Philosophy of Revelation*, both belonging to his *positive* philosophy period. This latter was proposed by Schelling as an antidote to idealism's self-

assuredness. If Hegel's work had brought dialectical thinking to its apex, Schelling's positive philosophy would deal with all the contingent aspects of reality that, as he himself was able to experience, are anything but docile systemic servants. One cannot help but wonder if the astonishing reading of Hölderlin's retreat that Girard puts forward in *Battling to the End* could be applied to Schelling's literary silence during the long period that preceded his reappearance.[77] Though Girard never mentions Schelling, the dynamic of the group to which he belonged along with Hölderlin and their elders Fichte, Goethe, and Schiller, among others, could be analyzed in terms of mimetic emulation, and both the definite withdrawal of Hölderlin and the long and somber silence of Schelling before his long awaited reappearance could be understood as an abandoning of the mimetic liaisons of their youth.

Though his inaugural lectures in Berlin on this subject left his audience a little bit perplexed and disappointed, a careful reading of these texts can, I believe, enhance our mimetic tools for a historical analysis of archaic religion that, though critical, never rejects it out of hand and places it as a ripening structure that strives for something else: peace, as Girard puts it. For Schelling, paganism, being both the historical and metaphysical past of humanity, cannot be wholly eradicated because it constitutes the ground for authentic Revelation, though, of course, this fact was not exempt from risks. And this constant crisis of polytheism is precisely one of the guiding threads of both Schelling's *Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* and his *Philosophy of Revelation*. Again, as he did when his main concern was art, he affirms the existence of mythic gods apart from any human fancy or caprice, as the result of situations of authentic crisis the resulting judgements of which end up by producing a successive series of gods. However, according to Schelling, this *unconscious* god-positing—analogous to what Girard calls *méconnaissance*—which results from a "primal but obscure potency" that violently displaces the Word each time, still strives to find the one true God. Girard also attempted to find this common thread in archaic culture, an oblique or blindsided search that prevents its full abandonment from a true vertical transcendence. Nevertheless, just as Girard, Schelling emphasizes the overmastering terror that accompanies the emergence of polytheism. If the succession of gods, even from a "supposedly" original monotheism, merely reflected the consecutive replacement of one concept for one more adequate—as some

anthropologists would have it—no violence should surface: "The mere eclipse of an earlier concept would not explain the fear that—by the indications already mentioned—humanity felt with the first appearance of polytheism. . . . The violence by which polytheism emerges into being is as little explained through a mere weakening of the original knowledge, as, on the other side, the attachment to a simple doctrine."[78]

Hence, the sacrificial structure of history posited by Girard could be understood in Schelling's terms—just as I believe he does in the chapters devoted to mythology in his *Philosophy of Revelation*—as a conflictual process that shakes the foundations of any previous order each time a new divine figure appears. Thus, the circuit of Demeter, Persephone, and Dionysus, each a tripartite figure, serves Schelling to characterize the process of *krísis, epídosis*, and *catábole* (crisis, paroxysm, and descent) that can be read throughout history. Now, the "unbearable pressure" that this cosmic deities exert over human consciousness all the way up to Christ's Revelation is tributary not to any of God's designs but to mankind's decision to subvert the authentic divine transcendence and turn it into a demiurgic potency that haunts man continually: the well-oiled machine of sacrifice described by Girard. So, humanity's *theopathic* character is due to this "satanic" temptation actualized by original sin—"Satan" being the subject of the last lessons of Schelling's *Philosophy of Revelation*.[79] And this temptation is exactly the same experienced by Christ in the desert: the possibility of maintaining a demonic grasp on humanity like the former gods, of becoming prince of this world. But as Girard puts it, Christ smashes his solar scepter and retires from this world.[80]

So, both for Girard and Schelling, mankind's fallenness is precisely this recurrent usurpation of the truly divine by the violent deities that produce history and art but cannot attain any lasting peace. Nevertheless, as I pointed out before, according to both thinkers, in mankind's history, traces, intimations, of Revelation can be found. Here, then, we are confronted with an unavoidable question of the most difficult order: Is mythology the necessary condition for the authentic Revelation? Is this an inexorable process determined beforehand by the theogonic process? Schelling responds in the negative. As Félix Duque, a foremost expert in German idealism puts it: "Necessity follows freedom and not the other way around. In spite of its chronological anteriority, mythology is ontologically brought about by Revelation and is posited by this latter as its background. So, it

happens that Revelation is the "truth" of the mythological phenomenon and not inversely."[81]

Let us say then, that Schelling, the same as Girard, opts for what Jean-Pierre Dupuy would call a Christian epistemology to shed light to what comes before the Cross as a sorrowfully inverted image of the truth. So, instead of opting for a dialectically necessary process perfectly translatable to speculative philosophy, Schelling takes very seriously the need for a new *narrative* philosophy that can relocate languor and crisis at the very heart of the Revelation of the absolute. I speak here of a theophany marked by our obstinate and occlusive god-positing and not a malicious theogony. Mythology finds its truth in its way to Revelation, but it is not imposed on us by God. The accent, like Girard's, is here, again, anthropological; a question of a desire that insidiously usurps the place of the Word. Hence only the absolutely free donation of God in Christ's Passion makes the previous history intelligible, without in any way justifying this painful process as traditional theodicy would do. If justifying, rationally or otherwise, the other's suffering is the beginning of immorality, as Levinas sharply puts it,[82] then the late Schelling's hard-won lucidity—what I would like to call his accomplished *conversion*—can be exempted from that charge, for it is only humanity's reversal of the delicate balance of the systole and diastole of Creation, ground and existence, yearning and expression, that detonates the mythical process of a fallen humanity without annulling its original yearning for authentic transcendence and love—a perspective that in hindsight we could call eminently Girardian.

For Girard, only a good mimesis can counteract the pull that mimetic rivalry and its violent outcome exerts over us. Hence Christ's Passion as exemplary obedience to a higher will is offered to humanity to follow, for, as Schelling movingly formulates it, "only what is personal can heal what is personal and God must become human so that man may return to God."[83] Following Paul's Letter to the Philippians,[84] Schelling affirms that God's *kenosis*, his hollowing and humiliation, means that he can submit himself to the "blind principle's" violence—that misguided yearning that sequentially and inevitably creates gods—and end this terrible parade of anthropomorphic deities, operating, thus, an inversion of the inversion. Schelling's last oeuvre, I believe, achieves the coherence that he looked for since his earliest writings and allows us thus, in order to make intelligible the history of mythology, to stop lowering the Passion to another mere

instance of a god falling prey to a furious mob—a leitmotif identified time and again by comparative religion—and elevate all the victims at the core of polytheism's violent genesis of gods to Christological figures, just as Girard does. Ultimately, for Schelling—the same is subscribed by Girard—after the Cross, humanity's future lies in the hands of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, who is precisely the defender of victims, the one that can begin to heal Demeter's yearning for her lost daughter, the accused innocents of their unjust wounds, the world's immemorial and true longing for redemption.

NOTES

1. Benoît Chantre, *Le clocher de Tübingen*, (Paris: Grasset, 2019), 266, 267. As Chantre recounts, Hölderlin's sadly misunderstood version of Sophocles and his commentaries on both *Antigone* and *Oedipus* were held in contempt also by Goethe and Schiller. This fact reveals much of the highly competitive and derisive atmosphere that prevailed among the early romantics, an attitude severely critiziced by René Girard.

2. In his last grand oeuvre *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, Girard consecrates many pages to his novel understanding of Hölderlin's melancholy figure, delivering him from Heidegger's pagan nostalgia and positing his final retreat as a patient *Imitatio Christi* and rejection of what others considered the Absolute: the all-encompassing war that threatened to swallow Europe.

3. Cf. Jason M. Wirth's introduction to *Schelling Now: Contemporary Readings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 7.

4. Emil Fackenheim, *The God Within, Kant, Schelling and Historicity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 51.

5. Girard exemplified this infernal cyclothymia with the idolatry a very young Hölderlin felt toward the renowned Friedrich Schiller. Cf. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 156, 157. A similar conflictual mimesis can be divined between the three youthful friends that planted the Tree of Freedom in Tübingen. Cf. Chantre, *Le clocher de Tübingen*.

6. René Girard, "From Novelistic Experience to Oedipal Myth," in *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire*, ed. Mark Anspach (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 16.

7. Cf. Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, 11.

8. Emil Fackenheim, *The God Within, Kant, Schelling and Historicity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 51.

9. Schelling's complete oeuvre has not yet been translated into English. The totality of his works can be found in the original German as *Sämmlitche Werke* (Stuttgart and Augsburg, 1856–1861). In order to facilitate the Girardian reading I attempt here, without sending English-language readers to the German texts, I have worked and referenced mainly texts that are translated with the exception of the *Philosophy of Revelation* whose French edition is more readily available than the German original.

10. Themes of the utmost importance for traditional philosophy had been rendered inadequate by Kant's transcendental philosophy for any scientific endeavor that followed Newtonian physics's unstoppable successes. Nevertheless, the three ultimate ideals that Reason as such inexorably arrives at—the world, the soul, and God—were not to be given up that easily. As a consequence, in Kant's system, they migrated into the sphere of practical reason as horizons that endow our free moral action with meaning. However, our relation to these regulating ideals is always asymptotic; first of all, because it would be scientifically unsound to proclaim our definitive possession of them, and second, so as to not put our morality in danger of self-indulgence—he who proclaims his own sanctitity falls immediately below that dearly sought after goal. So, we are left with an always unfinished task.

11. One of the not so fortunate deployments of this turn was the gnostic accompaniment of politics Eric Voegelin denounces as having its starting point in Schelling. See Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2005).

12. Fackenheim, *The God Within, Kant, Schelling and Historicity*, 67.

13. Art's crucial role as that function of the self, which attains what morals and science cannot, comes in handy too when confronted with the problem of law and freedom. Fichte, in a Kantian vein, had put forward religion as the joyous belief in the moral order of the world, nature being the sensuous content of our formal duty to contribute to such an order. But given the unconditional character of freedom, the self's encounter with the aforementioned order is lived either as a violent clash or as a mechanical submission, neither of which option is satisfactory. Schelling's turn to *Providence* to solve this opposition is not in any way arbitrary. Only the fragmentary character of the finite self can explain both the need of faith and thus of confidence in the ultimate coincidence of freedom with the world's structure and art's crucial role in explaining and superseding this limit imposed by our own precarity.

14. F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, part 6, § 1., trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978).

15. That, which in Kant cannot be presented because of its immeasurable character and gives rise to the feeling of the sublime, corresponds here to the action of the unconscious infinity in art. Nevertheless, Schelling recognized, as Kant did, that this confrontation can endanger the subject's integrity as rational agent.

16. F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 4.

17. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, 7.

18. We must remember that Schelling deploys his system of art in the context of his philosophy of Identity, so these series should not be thought of as actually distinct but only as displaying different emphasis of the Absolute. Real and ideal potencies or emphasis traverse the series of nature and mind, a thorough exposition of which is not possible in the present text. Let's just bear in mind that the disposition of potencies in art is analogous to the one found in the two former series.

19. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, § 39.

20. We must bear in mind that in each moment or phase of the series, the potencies begin anew and branch out. So, in the real series of art, music is allegoric, painting schematic, and sculpture symbolic. Curiously enough, for Schelling as for Levinas, the real minimum indispensable for music —the lowest in the sense of elemental but necessary form for art—is rhythm. For Levinas, all of art's mimetic sorcery depends on this seemingly humble beginning. And his critique of myth, absolutely compatible with Girard's, heavily depends on this phenomenological exploration. See Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow," *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989).

21. Schelling likens the epic poem to painting: a constant forward movement whose next moment has been withdrawn. For Girard and Levinas too, mythical conscience behaves just like this. The forward thrust of life is synchronically kept *safe* in the stories violence has consecrated and nothing can intervene to change this.

22. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, 216.

23. Ibid., 38.

24. Likewise, in Girard's hypothesis, the process by which the victims of sacrifice are posthumously considered gods is the same that gives rise to the law as such. The presumed transgression of the victim produces a new order in regard to which he or she is exempted because of their excessive nature.

25. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, 41.

26. Far from being the merely imaginary products of human fancy, gods have for Girard a very concrete function in the construction of meaning as such. They are not projections of an already constituted meaning; they are the first instances of meaning as such.

27. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, 51.

28. Ibid., 51, 52.

29. René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 64.

30. See René Girard, *Job: The Victim of his People*, trans. Yvonne Freccero, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 18. This alocution refers both to the collective character of the process that gives rise to the gods and to its ultimate arbitrariness.

31. See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 243–244.

32. Ibid., 249.

33. Ibid., 252.

34. Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 189.

35. José Luis Villacañas Berlanga, *Del sistema de libertad en Fichte al principio de la teología en Schelling*, vol., *La filosofía del idealismo alemán* (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 2001), 243.

36. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, 254

37. Just as Girard posits regarding a possible anthropological reading of many of the Presocratic's *dicta*, for example, Anaximander's reminder of the "injustice committed by the many towards the One."

38. Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, 54.

39. Ibid.

40. Up to this point in the development of Schelling's thought, his answer to the burning questions about law and nature, freedom and necessity that the Kantian paradigm left its idealist heirs to deal with—finds in art its ultimate form. While in the realm of speculative thought, all these contradictions are resolved beforehand in the indifference of the Absolute's identity—and it is idealism's task to demonstrate it—in art, and thus in life, they only become satisfactorily conveyed in drama.

41. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 166.

42. As I mentioned before, our somewhat long exposition of his *Philosophy of Art* tried to show how he was by no means lacking in systematic ability.

43. Cf. Chantre, *Le clocher de Tübingen*.

44. For a thorough exposition of Luria's thought, see Gershom Scholem, "Seventh Lecture: Issac Luria and his School," in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schoken, 1995). For Luria, the splitting between God's severe judgement and his mercy as well as his retraction into himself when creating produce the possibility of evil.

45. SUNY's edition of the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* includes Boehme's *Mysterium Pansophicum*.

46. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmitd (New York: SUNY Press), 33.

47. Ibid., 31.

48. Eric Gans, "René et Moi," in *For René Girard: Essays in Friendship and in Truth*, ed. Sandor Goodhart, Jorgen Jorgensen, Tom Ryba, and James Williams (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009).

49. For the corporeal language reissued by Schelling to confront idealism's bodily neglect, see David L. Clark, "Mourning Becomes Theory: Schelling and the Absent Body of Philosophy," in *Schelling and Romanticism: A Romantic Series Praxis Volume*, ed. David S. Ferris (pub. online at Romantic Circles, 2000), https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/schelling/index.html.

50. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 29.

51. "The will that steps out from its being . . . to elevate the ground over the cause, to use the spirit that it obtained only for the sake of the *centrum* outside the *centrum* and against creatures; from this results collapse within the will itself and outside it." Ibid., 23.

52. Ibid., 30.

53. Ibid., 42.

54. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 64,

55. Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (New York: Verso, 1996).

56. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 130.

57. See Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985).

58. See Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 33.

59. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 303.

60. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 34. In the introduction to *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion*, the word "mendacity" appears at least five times and is used to describe the distorted formations that come out of mimetic desire's violent tendencies and final paroxysm. Nothing truly enduring can come out of this enervated desire that relentlessly affirms itself against its truth and that is precisely what Schelling is trying to describe. James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2017); see also our note 52. Hölderlin as well is deeply concerned with the search of an equilibrium that will not produce "*aucune illusion trompeuse*" (any kind of deceitful illusion). Cf. Chantre, *Le clocher de Tübingen*, 268.

61. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 297.

62. Ibid., 299–325.

63. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 35.

64. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 4.

65. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 303 and 349.

66. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 44.

67. Ibid., 45.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid., 46.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Michel Serres, *Rome: The First Book of Foundations*, trans. Randolph Burks (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 110. In the dedication to this volume, Serres thanks René Girard for the true ideas he is about to develop.

73. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 46.

74. Ibid., 54.

75. René Girard, "Ases, Curetes, and Titans," in *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 66–75.

76. David Farrel Krell, "God's Footstool: A Note on the Source for Schelling's Description of the Olympian Zeus in the 1811 Draft of *The Ages of the World*," in *Schelling Now*, ed. Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 118.

77. René Girard, "Hölderlin's Sorrow," in *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* (East Lancing: Michigan State University Press, 2009), 109–35. In a triumphantly romantic gesture, young Schelling had eloped with August Wilhelm Schlegel's wife, Caroline. After her death though, he abandoned all of idealism's arrogant optimism and never attempted a systematic approach again. Life's brutal facticity perhaps turned him into the wounded hero in need of conversion described in Girard's first oeuvre.

78. F. W. J. Schelling, *Historical Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. Mason Richley (SUNY Press, 2008), 98.

79. Not particularly surprising given Schelling's and Girard's affinities traced up until this point is the former's exploration of the distinction of *Satan* as accuser and corruptor of Hebrews and *Diabolos* as the corruptor of pagans. See F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie de la Révélation*, trans. Jean-François Courtine and Jean-François Marquette (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 282. A few pages later, Schelling echoes Saint Paul (just as Girard did much, much later) concerning the influence that the Prince of this world can have over humanity even without existing. Ibid., 288.

80. René Girard, *Battling to the End*, 122. A very similar assertion can be found in Chantre's book about Holderlin: "Hölderlin envisages thus Incarnation and Ascension like a last return of nature in the midst of human conflicts: a last sacrifice . . . and [He] is the last to visit us departing forever from men. The Christ departs like all other deities, but his departing is different because it reveals the precarity of all orders of human origin: that men cannot understand themselves but for the Verb," *Le Clocher de Tübingen*, 132.

81. Félix Duque, *Historia de la Filosofía Modern:, La Era de la Crítica* (Madrid: Akal, 1998), 949.

82. Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," in *Entre nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Barbara Harshaw and Michael B. Smith, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 90–102.

83. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 45.

84. Philippians 2:6–8: “Who being in very nature God / did not consider equality with God something to be used to / his own advantage; / rather he made himself nothing / by taking the very nature of a servant / being made in human likeness. / And being found in appearance as a man / he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—/ even death on a cross!” (New International Version).

Alexis de Tocqueville

Jean-Marc Bourdin

Translated by Florina Haret

One long century separated the publication of René Girard's works from that of Alexis de Tocqueville's (1805–1859),[1] a significant interval that ought to have diminished their proximity. Now, even if in a parsimonious manner, Girard mentions Tocqueville throughout his entire work, even before *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1961, in its original version) and until *Battling to the End* (published in French in 2007).

To him, Tocqueville is not a philosopher—undoubtedly, one of the reasons for this privileged position. Indeed, Girard confidently displays a "philosophical naïveté."[2] Besides, Tocqueville enters the Girardian stage in 1960, along with Stendhal: thereon, he is raised, as it were, to the level of his contemporary, a novelist of genius by virtue of his pertinent observation of the mimetic mechanisms of desire and of vanity. Thus, Tocqueville would have been the only one of his peers, or almost, to have shared some novelists' and playwrights' lucidity on desire in this way, without, nevertheless, resorting to fiction. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard even grants him a certain superiority over two novelists of his time: "[he] is immunized against partisan positions [*sic*, in French original version: *poisons*] and the best of his works almost succeeds in providing the systematic expression of an historical and political truth which often remains implicit in the great works of" Flaubert and Stendhal.[3] Girard discovered in one of Tocqueville's main theses, the equality of conditions,

the sociological counterpart of his *interdividual* psychology, based on appropriative mimesis.

When referring to Tocqueville, Girard is slightly in advance of the French intellectuals of his generation.[4] However, he does not mention the former in the bibliography of his American thesis, defended in 1950 at Indiana University, which was dealing with the immediate history of the twentieth century ("American Opinion of France, 1940–1943") and in which he carried out an analysis of newspaper clippings of the time.[5]

Therefore, Tocqueville has his rightful place among Western philosophers with which Girard can be compared, even if there is a lingering doubt concerning the category of "philosopher": Tocqueville, sharing Girard's reluctance toward philosophy, saw himself as a political scientist and as a historian. Admittedly, the denominations of anthropologist and of sociologist, which suit him at least just as well, were not current during his age. Jon Elster has aptly titled an essay dedicated to him: "Alexis de Tocqueville, the First Social Scientist."[6] Nonetheless, political philosophy has incorporated Tocqueville's thought as one of its finest jewels, especially owing to the general tone of *Democracy in America, Volume 2*, much more abstract than the first volume, which had initially resulted in a more mixed reception. For our purpose, it is noteworthy that Girard deems this second volume to share the most ideas with mimetic theory.[7] Hence, Tocqueville had been a political philosopher without intending it,[8] and, by an effect of transitivity, Girard would then be a philosopher in spite of himself!

Finding commonalities between Tocqueville and Girard is an easy task. Even so, in Girard's followers, their obvious similarities most often translate into a mere "as Tocqueville had remarked" or something to that effect. The connection between these two respective reflections is worth a more systematically documented articulation. This is the aim of this study.

If Tocqueville appears as a model, a kind of great-uncle or of close cousin of Girard's, he at the same time provides the latter with an indispensable complement to mimetic theory, in a field where it is incomplete, namely political philosophy. For all that, when Tocqueville seems to position himself as an established predecessor and as a necessary addition, Girard is likely to bring him, in turn, an update and various appositions.

The measured admiration repeatedly professed by Girard for Tocqueville's work hides a much deeper proximity, of which he was probably not entirely aware, than it might seem at first glance.

Girard cites and mentions Tocqueville every once in a while. A first, superficial, explanation can be sought in biographical similarities. On a more serious note, their methods bring them together: they lead them to share certain ways of envisioning the destiny and state of mankind.

Thus, Tocqueville figures most extensively as early as 1960, during a lecture titled "Stendhal and Tocqueville."[9] Substantial excerpts—each of them several lines long, markedly longer than the quotes allocated to Stendhal, his associate of the day—appear there no less than seven times. Since 1961, in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Girard resumes the famous phrase by which Tocqueville introduced his topic in 1835: "I saw more and more, in equality of conditions, the generating fact from which each particular fact seemed to derive, and I rediscovered it constantly before me as a central point where all of my observations came together."[10] He also notices that Tocqueville talks of the "courtier spirit" and of the "restlessness, concern or worry" (according to translations) prevailing in democracies. Moreover, he attributes to Tocqueville the revelation of an essential aspect of triangular desire: "the vicious circle in which the passion of equality is trapped."[11]

There are many other reasons for this parallel: among abundant examples, "what most strongly holds the human heart is not the peaceful possession of a precious object but the imperfectly satisfied desire to possess it and the constant fear of losing it."[12] Far from eradicating rivalry, the equality of conditions (i.e., that of rights and, therefore, of aspirations), on the contrary, kindles it. The multiplication of obstacles and the energization of ambitions increase the level of unrest in democratic societies:

> They destroyed the annoying privileges of a few of their fellows; they encounter the competition of all. The boundary marker has changed form rather than place. When men are more or less similar and follow the same road, it is very difficult for any one of them to march quickly and cut through the uniform crowd that surrounds and crushes him.[13]

Tocqueville had identified what Girard would later call internal mediation. By stating that "the desire for equality always becomes more insatiable as equality is greater,"[14] he introduces the infernal dynamics of a claim to an equal power of being which he sees everywhere at work.

Later on, Tocqueville keeps appearing furtively, but regularly, in various book-length interviews: *When These Things Will Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer* in 1994,[15] *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* with Maria Stella Barbieri in 2001,[16] and *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* with Pier Paolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha in 2000;[17] finally, in *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre* in 2007. In this last work, Tocqueville is, again, associated with Stendhal, as well as with Nietzsche, as one of the first thinkers to have identified ressentiment—this modern passion par excellence—even before Dostoevsky. He is also given credit for having seen centralization as a negative tendency, whereas Clausewitz was impressed by the power that it had provided to Napoleon.[18]

Could a certain continuity of statements be detected? Clearly, there is an admiration for his distant predecessor's pertinence, even after a time span of more than a century. If philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists to have escaped Girardian critique are a rare occurrence, Tocqueville is always portrayed as a positive hero of social sciences and as a noteworthy exception to the Girardian paradox attributing to fiction writers better acumen than that usually displayed by the accredited theorists of the field.

Even if, at first glance, the similarity between our two authors' personal and intellectual destinies appears to pertain more to correlation than to causality, in the end, the accumulation of commonalities becomes uncanny and invites further scrutiny.

Clearly, the first similarity is transatlanticism: these two young French intellectuals have left their country in search of a better place after a long and trying political sequence that had compelled them to step back: the French Revolution, the First Empire, the Restoration, and the 1830 Revolution for one of them; the three wars against Germany, the weakness of the Third Republic, and the downfall of France during the Occupation for the other.[19] Even if the former comes back to France to pursue a career and the latter goes on to settle in the United States, biculturalism is essential to

them. What is more, both their respective wives are Anglo-Saxon and Protestant.

Their temperament, relying on the conviction of being closer to truth than their interlocutors, drives them toward controversy: in Girard's case within the framework of academic disputatio; in Tocqueville's, as attested by his speeches, preferably in political debates. They share an immoderate rejection of the extremes, which often leads them to make use of their opponents' habitual arguments, indicating their independence, as well as an unwillingness to join any clique whatsoever. Likewise, being free-minded, they have little concern for academic requirements.

Both of them share an interdisciplinary approach, mainly grounded in the use of archives, a method specific to historians. For Tocqueville, during the first half of the nineteenth century, when academic disciplines have yet to proliferate, things are simple: having studied law, he is an ephemeral magistrate; a political scientist supported by a non-negligible, though not high-profile, political experience; an amateur historian, but one whose methods are unquestionable; a proto-sociologist witnessing the rise of the middle class at more or less the same time when Marx favored an inescapable polarization between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (history would confirm the former's views); and a proto-anthropologist who understands, after Montesquieu, that any situation must be addressed by a multifactorial observation. Thus, Tocqueville assesses circumstances and mores just as much as institutions and legislations in order to figure out a social state. In the case of Girard, who puts forward his immense synthesis at the end of the twentieth century, in a landscape where fragmentation seems to have become the main motivation of researchers in the human and social sciences, whose watchword is, from now on, "to each their own niche," it is a much rarer and more meritorious endeavor.

They favor firsthand written sources. Both of them promote a scientific understanding of human interactions: "a new political science is needed for a world entirely new,"[20] for the former; for the latter, an anthropology that would be "a science of human relationships,"[21] rather than the social sciences or the humanities as they are usually less precisely referred to. Finally, if they distrust general ideas, they nonetheless believe in the driving force of ideas to bring about social evolutions, whether they deplore or they desire them—actually, a belief or a conviction where most of the

intellectuals converge. Both of them want to be theorists of the evolution of human societies.

More surprisingly and undoubtedly substantiating this parallel, each of them seems to first of all bring most of their research down to a meta-mechanism having a religious connotation, to which a long-term evolution, deemed at the same time inescapable, desirable, and dangerous, is attributed: for Tocqueville, the Providence, and for Girard, the Evangelical Revelation. Then, it comes down to two, and only two, seminal tendencies, which are concatenated and recombined according to the topics of study. To Tocqueville, a time span of thousands of years is marked by the tendency toward equality of conditions in the Western world, whose horizon is called democracy, in contrast to the inequality of conditions, which reserves prerogatives and obligations to a hereditary aristocracy; and the modern age tends toward the centralization of a political and/or administrative power in France, but also in other European countries as well, and even in the United States. As for Girard, he sees in the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism a movement starting with the Old Testament and definitively set in motion since the Passion of Christ, whereas the modern age is marked, starting from Shakespeare and from Cervantes, by a continuous aggravation of the pathologies of mimetic desire.

These tendencies, which are so ponderous as to bear no fluctuations whatsoever, reveal proximities, but also singularities between the two thinkers. Tocqueville's combination of the equality of conditions and of centralization made him fear the degradation of liberal democracy into despotism; his political commitment follows from it. Girard brings together the scapegoat mechanism and mimetic desire in the persistence of the misconception of human violence; he is constantly looking for what could allow the contention and the repression of this violence, which he sees both at the origins and at the end of humanity, while placing his hope in doubtful massive and simultaneous conversions. Therefore, history has a meaning, whether it leads to improvements or to an apocalypse, in other words, a direction that can be identified and, maybe, influenced.

If, at first glance, these two perspectives seem to suffice to differentiate them, concatenations are conceivable: the various pairings between Tocquevillian and Girardian tendencies prove this to be the case. Hence, more or less simultaneously, the equality of conditions and the escalation of appropriative mimesis are connected, the former conditioning the latter,

which, in its turn, intensifies egalitarian claims, as well as, concurrently, illusive aspirations for differentiation. As for the association between the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism and centralization, it probably contains the self-styled victimhood claims to the public authorities that have acquired considerable importance during the second half of the twentieth century, giving rise to the "struggles for recognition" of minorities seeking to secure rights from the states. Centralization, whose paragon is Louis XIV, followed closely in France by Napoleon, is also a condition of possibility for the spreading of mimetic desire, which Tocqueville understands. Finally, the equality of conditions takes part in the undermining of the scapegoat mechanisms, by giving the last word to a procedural justice that strives to prevent the arbitrary designation, without due process of law, of victims to be sacrificed and lynched by unanimous mobs.

Even on this point, Tocqueville's practical experience brings him closer to Girard, who readily admits it. Indeed, the memory of Malesherbes—counsel to Louis XVI, the king of France sentenced to death and executed by revolutionaries in 1793, Malesherbes himself being put to death soon after—accompanied his great-grandson Tocqueville throughout his research, in the form of a bust on his desk.[22] There is no doubt that this constant presence alerted him to the ever-renewing likelihood of royal sacrifice. Girard emphasizes this uncommon insight: "He was the first to perceive the difference between democracy and monarchy, which he rightly saw as being based on a unique kind of sacrificial animal, the king. Democracy, although it contains as many obstacles as there are individuals in society, leads people to believe there are no more obstacles, because the king has been overthrown. No one before Tocqueville saw that, to the contrary, if the shadow of the cripple is no longer cast over the world, it is because the world is on its way to become a cemetery."[23]

This combination highlights the compatibility of the two theories, even if they are viewed through a different lens, as a consequence of our two authors having lived in different times and having had different concerns. Tocqueville takes an interest in political institutions, whereas Girard is concerned with the outbreak and contention of violent rivalries, reducing the political to the smallest possible amount. Hence, he places all his hope in the conversion of individuals, whereas Tocqueville wants to believe in a beneficial coevolution of mores and of socio-political organizations. Simply put, and at the risk of approximation, the Girardian Revelation offers

salvation as a redemptive horizon, whereas the Tocquevillian Providence is seeking the conditions for an enduring softening of mores.

Another common point, the Tocquevillian apprehension makes possible "the lack of being" underlying mimetic desire.[24] Before Girard, Tocqueville also remarks the major role of the unanimous mob. In the introduction to *De la violence à la divinité* in 2007, taking stock of his work, upon revisiting his first four foundational essays, Girard states: "The mimetic theory of desire has many commonalities with Tocqueville's thought, as expressed in the second part of *Democracy in America*."[25] Tocqueville is the first to consider the equality of conditions and the competition of opposing equals as joint phenomena. He bears witness to the spreading of internal mediation within democratic societies just as he notices it.

In each of our two thinkers, these tendencies reflect a taste for the long duration and for the universal. Moreover, by extending them into the future, they manifest a capacity for foresight, even a taste for prophecy. A hindsight of more than a century and a half proved Tocqueville right on many issues. But Girard could henceforth lay claim to having anticipated some good fifteen years in advance, among other things, the sense of the apocalyptic and the catastrophism, the collapsology even, nowadays prevailing in many analyses regarding the future of mankind.

Both of them strive first and foremost to listen to the voice of reality, that of the mores, and to make its unprecedented tones heard by drawing on observations apparently as simple as tendencies spanning several centuries or millennia. Thus, they face no major divergences in acknowledging the importance of religion, and particularly of Christianity, in a world that imagines itself as having been desecularized and liberated from obscurantism by the Western Enlightenment.

At all events, sticking to this game of similarities, it would be hard to find a third intellectual sharing with Tocqueville and Girard all or even most of these traits.[26] Everything unfolds as if, to a certain extent, and all other things being equal, Girard had been decisively, but unconsciously, influenced by a forerunner born almost 120 years before him.

Here, in the second section of this chapter, I take the liberty to make use of an intentional anachronism, by claiming that the Girardian theory, which

seems to be largely ignoring the political, has actually taken it into account, in advance and in a convincing fashion, more than one century before its conception. And this, of course, thanks to Tocqueville.

Researchers interested in Girardian anthropology count among their points of consensus the observation that the place of the political therein is limited and that it is not necessary, or even possible, to secure a larger one for it, or even that the political is a dead angle of mimetic theory:[27] the skepticism manifested by Girard with regard to political science, which anthropology is called to replace, and his doubts concerning the current and future capabilities of law to regulate human relationships, expressed in *Battling to the End*, bear witness to this. If proof were needed, the consultation of his archives confirms his tropism for myths, sacrifices, and the Judeo-Christian tradition, as well as his lack of interest in political matters, except when approaching them from a historical perspective.[28]

When, nevertheless, in book-length interviews, he is asked about a topic with political overtones, his thought follows a conservative/progressive axis in order to highlight the fact that, depending on the circumstances, his critics might reproach him for being either one or the other, whereas, personally, he intends to stay away from such attributions. As for Tocqueville, his intention follows a more fundamental axis between liberalism and despotism. He had also foreseen, in a logic closely resembling Girard's, and facts have proved him right later on, that the reception of *Democracy in America* would have been deemed exceedingly harsh on democracy, or, conversely, a reckless encouragement of its development.[29]

Girard's commitment lies entirely in his apologia for Christianity, and it has no other political bearing than endorsing long-term Catholic politics, from the struggle between pope and emperor for the domination of the West up to the German-French reconciliation initiated by general de Gaulle and chancellor Konrad Adenauer, both of them devout Catholics. Conversely, Tocqueville's commitment is a political one, his invocations of Providence and of God hiding a certain agnosticism: he states his support for a liberal democracy free from any cumbersome administrative apparatus and where multiple power-holders would mutually prevent one another from abusing it; to him, this ideal must avoid the two pitfalls of reaction and of socialism, as well as the beliefs on which they rest.

Hence, if mimetic theory includes the possibility of a political theory, the latter is necessarily indebted to his precursor, Tocqueville. A simple argumentation leads to this conclusion, by merely developing Girard's contention, "if there is a true science of politics, it begins with Tocqueville":

- If Tocqueville's analysis of democratic mores allowed him to identify appropriative mimesis under the guise of mores commingling the envious passions, the obsession with material welfare, individualism, and the unrest typical of the democratic man, and
- if Tocqueville manages to connect these mores with the political institutions allowing them and created by them,
- then mimetic theory can (and must) incorporate a political theory on democratic ages, largely inspired by Tocqueville's ideas.

Just as logically, the ritual obligations and religious prohibitions of the traditional societies extensively studied by Girard find their political counterpart within the rule of law in the judicial institutions and laws containing and framing civic and private liberties, with the aim of ensuring that all citizens can equally benefit from them, which is the focus of Tocqueville's reflection. This connection is further enhanced when considering the political as a continuation of religion by other means.

Which are, then, Tocqueville's major contributions of mimetic theory? The tendencies identified as crucial by Tocqueville and Girard, woven together into the fabric of a long-term social and political history, provide an opportunity to address one of the three institutional modalities of violence contention that the latter has not sufficiently explored, to wit, the political; simply put, the political comes second to the religious aspect, on which Girard mainly focused, and before the economical aspect, which some of his followers have promptly examined through the lens of mimetic theory.[30] The tendency caused by the revelation of sacrificial mechanisms, which results in a loss of their efficacy when faced with the outburst of violence, obviously corresponds to the religious field. That tendency of the proliferation of appropriative mimesis and of its increasing pathologization paves the way for the economical field to become an emblematic place of lawful rivalries and competitions that supersede physical violence and mitigate its scope in human relationships. The Tocquevillian tendency toward the equality of conditions leads to democracy, whereas that toward

centralization deals with the organization of powers within a specific context, that of the rule of law. Therefore, we hold there the two threads that mimetic theory was missing in order to be able to incorporate the political and connect it at the same time to the declining religious aspect and to the ascending economical aspect as one of the three major instruments for the contention of violence in modern and contemporary states.

Tocqueville is interested in the evolutions of institutions, as well as in those of mores, and in the differences and similarities that he detects primarily between the United States and France, but also Great Britain or, alternatively, Germanic law. This comparatist's work makes him notice the emergence of the sovereignty of the people in America in its most advanced form. He also detects therein the birth of public opinion and the threat of a new despotism, the "tyranny of the majority," an odd phrase. He had previously formulated in a convincing manner, thanks to his invocation of democratic mores, the political and mimetic theory, since *Democracy in America, Volume 1*:

> Democratic institutions develop the sentiment of envy in the human heart to a very high degree, not so much because they offer each person the means to become equal to others, but because these means constantly fail those who use them. Democratic institutions awaken and flatter the passions for equality without ever being able to satisfy. . . . People become heated in search of this good, all the more precious it is close enough to be known, but far enough away not to be savored. The chance to succeed rouses the people; the uncertainty of success irritates them. They get agitated, grow weary, become embittered. Then, everything that is in some way beyond them seems an obstacle to their desires, and there is no superiority, however legitimate, that they do not grow tired of seeing.[31]

Hence, the role of the mediator evolves in democratic ages, when "each of its citizens always seeing near himself several points that are above him and . . . he will obstinately turn his attention solely in their direction."[32] Then, any desire becomes a desire to match or to outdo the other, who surpasses one. This is how the strange relation between equality and rivalry —wherein an ever-present feeling of inferiority generates envy rather than admiration—is forged. Indeed, the restless has not obtained what he actually desires, that is, an inaccessible supplement of being. Tocqueville thus witnesses the way in which equality suggests undefined perfectibility, leading to collective effects:

> His failures make him see that no one can claim to have discovered absolute good; his successes inflame him in pursuing the absolute without respite. Therefore, always searching,

> failing, getting up again, often disappointed, never discouraged, he tends constantly toward the immense grandeur that he half sees vaguely at the end of the long course that humanity must still cover.[33]

In a well-known page, Tocqueville also reveals the workings of the mechanism that keeps levelling conditions ever more, while leading to centralization and to the risk of despotism:

> The hatred that men bring to privilege increases as privileges become rarer and smaller, so that you would say that democratic passions become more inflamed at the very time when they find the least sustenance. . . . This immortal and more and more burning hatred, which animates democratic peoples against the least privileges, singularly favors the gradual concentration of all political rights in the hands of the sole representative of the State.[34]

This mechanism reflects the progressive invasion of the field of human passions by internal mediation. Nevertheless, an asymmetry appearing as an exception to the rule of the equality of conditions is allowed to exist. Indeed, Tocqueville concludes the previous excerpt by the following words: "The sovereign, necessarily and without dispute above all citizens, does not excite the envy of any of them, and each one believes that all the prerogatives that he concedes to the sovereign are taken away from his equals."[35] He preserves the radical difference attributed by Hobbes to the Leviathan. Girard had noticed this when referring to Louis XIV, a paradigmatic absolute monarch dominating all of his subjects and, consequently, equalizing them.[36]

Furthermore, Tocqueville and Girard solve the problem presented by equality among common people, which is, as it were, atomized, and power concentrated in one person. In a democracy, the solution lies in the force of numbers: the Tocquevillian public opinion or the Girardian mob. Concerning the president of the United States and the king of France, Tocqueville specifies: "But above the one as above the other stands a ruling power, that of public opinion. . . . In America, it proceeds by elections and by decisions; in France, by revolutions."[37] This sounds like an echo of the Girardian *summa divisio* of the political, opposing the mob to the established powers, especially in Jesus's trial, where Pilate's will ends up giving in to the whims of the mob. Joining forces in order to assert common interests allows people to gain power against or alongside authorities. Thanks to Tocqueville's clarifications, one can see better what particular

interests choosing cooperation, without sacrificing competition—what he terms properly understood interest—can signify.

At the time of Tocqueville's writing, sovereignty is still under debate in France, at the end of a long Revolution which he deems to be incomplete and upon whose outcome he reflects. Rather sparing with definitions, Tocqueville nonetheless provides a lapidary one for sovereignty: "the right to make laws."[38] It thus flags the entanglement lying at the heart of all transcendence: if sovereignty is "the right to make laws," under a rule of law, creating rights is up to the law. He focuses his attention on a peculiar type of sovereignty, that possessed by the people.

At the beginning of the French Revolution, citizenship excludes part of the people from voting power: in 1791, the Constituent Assembly established a censitary regime. Following countless vicissitudes, this issue was still topical in France when Tocqueville was writing *Democracy in America*: King Louis-Philippe lowered the poll tax in the vain hope of preserving it. Confronted with this blindness, Tocqueville asks a rhetorical question: "Do you think that after having destroyed feudalism and vanquished kings, democracy will retreat before the bourgeois and the rich?"[39] His considerations on America, where the equality of conditions goes together with the sovereignty of the people, contrast with the French situation: there, indeed, the poll tax kept diminishing until it ended up in its opposite, universal suffrage.

Tocqueville also sees the rules concerning the transmission of estate from one generation to the next as a key element of social transformation. Once legislation transcribes the tendency toward equality in inheritance law, suppressing birthright as a reflection of aristocratic values, it divides assets among descendants, which has repercussions on the conception of an electoral body. Where the poll tax translates the will to create a substitute of aristocracy, inheritance rules scattering estates produce a democratic antidote. Laws can thus limit the scope of appropriative mimesis, starting from within families, the basic cells of society. It can be remarked that commercial law and labor law are likely to act in the same way in the economic field. This is a good example of what political and legal institutions can do so as to contain certain mimetic desires: splitting an estate or the rights and obligations within an organization. This type of topic, of little interest to Girard, lies at the center of the Tocquevillian socio-political dynamics. Then, in constitutional law, the sovereignty of the

people represents the political translation of the equality of conditions that it must ensure.

Tocqueville is the analyst of an exceptional historical situation: in the emergent United States, he encounters a citizenship that is being built on the rejection of a remote sovereignty, that of the British colonist, and on the creation of another one—which, incidentally, its promoters intend to keep just as remote—that of the federal Union; he notices therein the entrenching of political and economic competition as a conflict-regulating principle, but also a social state being founded on multiple exclusions, not only the emancipation from the British Crown, but also the repression of Native Americans and the enslavement of people of African origin. In this clearly presented context, he retraces the history of the sovereignty of the people in America:[40] the Puritans'—the first emigrants'—doctrine contains the seeds of the elements of a democratic and republican theory based on the *covenant*. He finds the trace of a *quasi*-social contract in New England as early as 1620: the colonists agree on the promulgation of laws and on the appointment, as needed, of magistrates to whom they submit and whom they obey. They manifest their sovereignty at all times. The contemporary individual's aspiration for sovereignty in all matters was then met by a community-wide continuous collective practice. The constitutional principles developed by English and French philosophers at the end of the seventeenth and at the beginning of the eighteenth centuries are already put into practice there: tax-free vote, responsibility of government officials, individual freedom, and trial by jury. The communes then relinquish a portion of their independence to the benefit of the state, only for the interests that they share with other communes. The democratic organization starts at the lowest territorial level, from the commune or the county, and it goes up to the state, and, finally, to the Union. Therefore, the remit of the highest echelon is defined in a restrictive manner. During the American Revolution, "the dogma of the sovereignty of the people emerged from the town and took over the government; all classes took risks for its cause; they fought and triumphed in its name; it became the law of the laws."[41] Here emerges a new solution to the problem of defining sovereignty as "the right to make laws." The law establishing the sovereignty of the people dominates all the rest: a kind of *supra*-constitutional principle, it represents "the law of the laws."

The sovereignty of the people, like a secondary operative event, politically states the equality of conditions. Meeting a need for transcendence that is common to the entirety of human collectivities, it permeates all relationships, from the bottom to the top of society,[42] and it connects the particular and the collective at every level of social aggregation. To Tocqueville, the sovereignty of the people and democracy seem to be two perfectly correlative words: one of them represents the theoretical idea; the other, its practical implementation.[43] Henceforth, there is no more room for the one and the others, as monarchy could have elicited, or for the ones different from the others, as in aristocratic ages; in a society of peers, where mimetic desire proliferates, everyone becomes the other of the others.

Nonetheless, the general dissemination, in the United States, of a certain taste for independence and for freedom would limit the devastation wrought by the equality of conditions. In democratic ages tradition is replaced by reason: the sovereignty of the people provides the framework for a free and independent allegiance to a system of collective constraints, as long as it saves enough space for personal initiatives and for associative adhesions.

However, this optimistic provisional conclusion only holds if freedom is not confiscated by a despot and if the spirit of independence stands up to the majority opinion. Indeed, a new despotism is liable to spread to ideas, habits, and thoughts, engulfing both public and private life, to a greater extent than a classical political system. The tyranny of the majority opinion occurs when "the majority . . . claims to be the only instrument of reason."[44] This majority opinion is an avatar of the omnipotent Girardian mob. For, if the people govern, then the majority governs on behalf of the people. Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the Union, had foreseen this: "The tyranny of legislators is now and will be for many years to come the most formidable danger."[45]

In order to mitigate this risk, the behaviors induced by mimetic desire are framed and, simultaneously, encouraged by a set of rules: Each individual constitutes an equal portion of the sovereign and takes part equally in the governance of the state. Everyone obeys society because the union with their peers seems to them to be useful. Each citizen is, at the same time, "a voter and eligible for office and jury."[46] Freedom of expression goes through the absence of press censorship and, even more

and despite its dangers, through the unlimited freedom of association, both of them reinforcing each other. The absence of administrative and political centralization, a vital instrument for tyranny, limits its advance. The judicial power is the guarantor of individual freedoms, it assesses the constitutionality of laws and it protects civil servants in the performance of their official duties against arbitrary acts. The Supreme Court has the jurisdiction to establish the jurisdiction of other courts of law.

Therefore, so as not to be oppressive, sovereignty must be distributed in an orderly fashion: among all citizens; among all levels of the exercise of power; among numerous magistrates at each territorial level; among each of the three powers independent from one another, the judicial power being effectively separated from the executive (as for the legislative power, it is itself divided between two Houses); between a majority opinion and political associations enjoying unlimited freedom of constitution and of expression. The combination of these various modalities limits the tendency toward centralization. A unanimous sovereignty, always dangerous, must be fragmented in multiple components destined to compete with one another in order to mitigate the risks of an abuse of dominant position, under the aegis of, in the end, a constitutionality review of the dealings of the majority. This is also the means to multiply the opportunities for satisfying the appropriative desires to a certain extent. Furthermore, a sovereignty of humanity justifies the disobedience to an unjust law, decreed by the people, for "justice forms the limit of the right of each people."[47] Thus, sovereignty loses its absolute value, by being subject to a type of natural law.

Among the spaces that allow escaping both the centralizing aspiration and the dictates of opinion, by producing a force that is strong enough to maintain the freedoms, without being able to lay claim to hegemony, Tocqueville favors associations: so numerous and active in America, they are as many free assembly points for volunteers and members who, barring dysfunctions, must refrain from competing against each other. They are, potentially, a space of non-conflictual mimetic desires, converging around a single social purpose. Tocqueville insists on their necessity:

> Sentiments and ideas are renewed, the heart grows larger and the human mind develops only by the reciprocal action of men each other. . . . This action is almost nil in democratic countries. So it must be created there artificially. And this is what associations alone are able to do. . . . Associations, among democratic people, must take the place of the powerful individuals that equality of conditions has made disappear.[48]

The association replicates a form of external mediation around objectives shared by equals that are not necessarily similar to one another. Tocqueville goes as far as to state: “In democratic countries, the science of association is the mother science; the progress of all the others depends on the progress of the former.”[49] The art of association must go together with the equality of conditions in order to offset the latter’s potentially harmful effects.

Set against this arguably somewhat idealized depiction of America, the French Revolution and the ancien régime appear to him as an unprecedented concentrative undertaking: “you will see an extensive unified power which has attracted and absorbed into its centre all the fragments of authority and influence which previously had been scattered between a group of secondary power bases, social orders, classes, professions, families, and individuals, all of which were spread throughout the body of society.”[50] By destroying and regrouping the powers and influences previously dispersed, the centralization carried out leaves the field open for an aggravation of the pathologies generated by internal mediations.

Like the other peoples, the Americans also end up under the threat of the tyranny of public opinion: The quest for welfare and apathy join forces in the rule of what Tocqueville calls the “total reason” and place society and individuality under the omnipotence of the state. Citizens are separated. They no longer face their ideas or their feelings, and they find themselves unable to share them. Thanks to the outstanding power of his reasoning, Tocqueville anticipates this future form of democratic despotism that will receive the name of totalitarianism in the twentieth century.[51] In the same movement, and as if without realizing it, he foresees what is nowadays denounced as ultraliberalism: the latter also separates individuals and disrupts the exchange of ideas, as well as the sharing of feelings, under the iron rule of an automaton called “market,” to which omnipotence was delegated by a state that was quitting, willingly or unwillingly, an internationalized stage where it was becoming only an extra. Thus, the Tocquevillian apocalypse is post-political through and through, and this is the case whatever its modality might be: what he terms the social state no longer exists, the individualistic rationalism in pursuit of its interests making do with a common opinion which bullies individual minds, by stopping or derailing the circulation of ideas.

Hence, the democratic sovereignty of the people is likely to deteriorate into a totalitarian despotism, if a market ideology or despotism can still exist when the common opinion has excluded any idea of a social sphere. Everything must be permanently deployed so that the safeguarding of freedoms prevents the risks posed to the social state by the tendencies toward equality and toward centralization: the freedoms to think and to disseminate ideas, already at the heart of Spinoza's concerns, or that of association, are still under threat, despite all the bills of rights. Confronted with rationality and with the abstraction of equality, the indispensable freedom leans toward feeling: it represents the means par excellence of not sinking into exclusive concerns over material welfare and its interests.

It should also be noted that Tocqueville's work can be read as a practical handbook on good and on bad governance, based on observations of a historical and sociological nature. It not only contains a science but also an art of the political.

The filiation and the hybridization of ideas once established, there is still one last step to be taken, the most obvious one after all, that dictated by chronology: Girard's contribution to Tocquevillian theory. There are at least two ways of perpetuating a thought, even unintentionally: the first one is to actualize it by making its concepts, adjusted if need be, confront events postdating its formulation. The second one is to ensure its expansion, its transcending even, be it by going toward previously unexplored fields, by incorporating disciplines, or by overcoming aporias.

Incidentally, although a visionary, Tocqueville was convinced that history was not written in advance, even if he had been capable of detecting some of its tendencies. But, obviously, he did not possess information on the events taking place during the second part of the nineteenth century and subsequently. If attempting here a general actualization of Tocquevillian theory is out of the question, two illustrations shall give an idea of the method to be used in order to bring it to a successful conclusion.

First of all, the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism helps explain an evolution initiated some sixty years ago: in Tocqueville, the tyranny of opinion emanated from the majority; it is now progressively giving in to the tyranny of minorities. Girard has experienced on American campuses the

struggles for the emancipation of women, for the equality of civil rights claimed by ethnic minorities, or for the freedom of sexual orientation; he noticed their perverse effects at a very early stage. In the world of ideas, communitarianism and the struggles for recognition are their theoretical forms. In practice, as Girard has shown in *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, the concern for victims, created by Christianity over a long time, ended up encouraging victimhood claims. For instance, the "politically correct" is from now on hindering the dissemination of ideas and endangering its political forms, namely the freedoms of opinion and of expression. Equal freedom is never acquired once and for all: progress is reversible, and that of equality can occur at the expense of certain freedoms. Legitimate claims concerning the equality of situations are always likely to lead to amputations of freedom. In its most current stage of aggravation, the tyranny of the minority unfolds along the axes of the cancel culture, which would probably have joined Tocqueville and Girard in the same consternation: the reparations claimed for slavery and for colonialism, as well as for their consequences, lead to the toppling of statues and to the occultation of a part of history, as if only the victims could be exempt from all responsibility and as if only alleged purity were worthy of remembrance.

Secondly, the increasing pathologization of desire is translated into the spreading of ressentiment via the various forms of populism, supremacy, anarchy, popular revolts, obsessions with identity, self-defense militias, the expressions of hate authorized by social networks, etc. It is a catalyst for mutual violence between activists and law enforcement personnel. Now, the terms of *ressentiment, grudge, rancor*, etc. are almost absent from Tocqueville's vocabulary,[52] even if he is among the first thinkers to have foreseen the emergence of the phenomenon, and, when these words do show up under his pen, it is most often under a negative form or in order to mention a phenomenon of limited significance. In his acceptance speech at the Académie française,[53] he nonetheless estimates that the unfulfilled promises of revolutions leave their partisans and beneficiaries just as embittered as they are happy. This connection with the revolution appears in his works in the case of certain synonyms for *ressentiment*, in particular *anger* and especially *hate* (associated with *envy* and *jealousy*, as in Stendhal), therefore in a French context rather than in that of American democracy, which appears to him as more sheltered from the manifestation of these feelings at the time of his observations, almost two centuries ago.

These affects of anger and hatred appear to predate the ressentiment combining and complicating them. Admittedly, apathy and the quest for welfare under the guise of "total reason," as well as the feeling of unrest, draw Tocqueville's attention to a greater extent in his time. The man of ressentiment is mainly identified by Girard in Dostoevsky, whom he deems to have described in his novels metaphysical desire in its most extremely pathological form. Girard and Dostoevsky thus allow the actualization of what Tocqueville could not have foreseen to a larger extent and in a better way than Stendhal.

These two actualizations have been possible by combining the tendencies detected by Tocqueville in the nineteenth century with the Girardian tendencies. This could be the method to follow for other actualizations. Whereas Tocqueville cautiously stays within a thousand-year perspective, indeed a seven-hundred-year one, as he repeatedly mentions in the introduction to *Democracy in America, Volume 1*, Girard does not hesitate to situate himself on a time scale going back to hominization, therefore millions of years ago, indeed to *Homo sapiens*, hence between 200,000 to 300,000 years ago, or, somewhat more reasonably, to the Neolithic and its beginnings in Anatolia, thus some 10,000 years ago. This temporal extension is formidable, therefore debatable, but it allows positioning the monarchic function within the scope of the long history of sacred kings designated to be scapegoats on reprieve, sacrificeable as soon as violence calls into question the continued existence of the community. Louis XVI's fate establishes a parallel between him and a rainmaking African king during a persisting period of drought or between him and Oedipus facing the plague in Thebes. It also makes it possible to think that, before the thousand-year tendency toward equality, an original Paleolithic equality predated a long rise in the inequalities of conditions until the High Middle Ages in the West.[54]

In over a century, ethnology, psychology, theology, and economics have made significant progress. Obviously, Girard benefitted greatly from it. His interdividual psychology would not have been possible in the absence of psychoanalysis and the unity of myths—as well as their tendency to evolve toward erasing the bloody traces of the facts, having provided the inspiration for them—and would not have been theorized in the absence of Lévi-Strauss's challenge. It should never be forgotten that Girard's model-obstacles are, first of all, his models! Whereas Tocqueville was already

pushing the boundaries of political science, Girard suggests encompassing, even more broadly, the resources of anthropology and of other approaches, in a true science of human relationships. Thus, Girard offers novel perspectives and a complete toolkit to any continuator of Tocqueville.

In keeping with Girard's explicitly admiring standpoint, this chapter has largely avoided critiques with regard to the hugely impressive Tocquevillian thought. The former obviously had his reservations, which are suggested by his, after all, moderate use of political science—as well as by his disinterest in the political and by his incidental remarks on political science's obsolescence—and of law in particular. More precisely, the phrase used by Girard to introduce his reference to Tocqueville: "in his best works, he almost" shows that the tendencies that he has identified need to be supplemented by Girardian tendencies so as to get somewhere even closer to the historical and political truth of our time. Or, at least, this is the viewpoint adopted here.

In any event, in the absence of more explicit writings by him, while staying laudatory, in accordance with the general tone of this account, I shall adopt, in concluding, a philosophically critical stance, borrowed from a historic Girardian, who has tried his hand, together with several others,[55] at exploring the potentialities of mimetic theory in the political field: the French philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy, who includes Tocqueville, on this occasion, in the great political philosophy. To him, political deliberation must envisage a horizon whose reaching depends on the way in which it is anticipated.[56] The Hobbesian sovereignty of a Leviathan produced by contracts—the sovereign himself not being subject to such contractual requirements—fails to give satisfying shape to what Dupuy calls a self-transcendence. The expression of the general will, conceived by Rousseau, needs a similar overtopping position ("to place law above man"), whereas it is consciously produced by people. This paradox also remains unsolved: this is evidenced by the fact that such a mechanism is at work in the production of the totalitarian pseudo-transcendences of the twentieth century. To Dupuy, "authority can come neither from the outside nor from other human beings. Tocqueville's solution to the problem of squaring the circle is this: authority is derived from a third party—a party that is not any person in particular and that appears to each member of society as something outside him, though without being outside him. The third party is evidently the result of a process of self-transcendence."[57] Thus, only

Tocqueville gets closer to the solution with his observation of a public opinion being established in the United States, an assessment that Dupuy upholds by drawing attention to the following passage: “and more and more it is opinion that leads the world. . . . In times of equality, men, because of their similarity, have no faith in each other; but this very similarity gives them an almost unlimited confidence in the judgement of the public.”[58]

Nevertheless, Dupuy reproaches Tocqueville for a methodological individualism that does not manage to see in the public opinion a genuine collective quasi-subject, the likes of which are constituted in the case of currency, confidence, and conventions, or of what Keynes called “business confidence.”[59] He favors what could be termed, in reference to Girard and his followers, a methodological interdividualism, in contrast at the same time to methodological holism and individualism, between which the approaches of social sciences researchers seem to be divided. But the germ of this idea undoubtedly exists with the admittedly imprecise Tocquevillian notion of social power. As remarked by Claude Lefort, this is an anonymous or sovereign power, associated with the need to be ruled: “a diffuse, invisible power, which is both internal and external to individuals; which is produced by individuals and which subjugates individuals; which is as imaginary as it is real; and which is imprinted on government, administration and opinion alike.”[60] It goes beyond the power of political institutions, to the extent that it derives its power to act from the majority consensus. Using this phrase some forty times throughout his work, Tocqueville has only defined it in the following terms:

> This unbounded social power conceived by the Economists was not only greater than any they could observe around them, it was also different in origin and character. It did not flow directly from God; it did not have ties to tradition; it was impersonal; no longer called the king but the state, no longer the inheritance of one family but the result and representative of all. The rights of each citizen had to yield to the will of all.[61]

From the confrontation between Tocqueville and Girard in the early 2020s, certainly expected and even unavoidable here, ensues the conviction that not only is the Tocquevillian political theory mimetic, but that it is also the indispensable catalyst of a completed mimetic theory, of a “science of human relationships” that Girard had left unfinished due to a lack of

personal interest in the political: the perspectives previously opened up by Tocqueville coincide with a final stage of pathologization of metaphysical desire combining, according to him, apathy (therefore, social and political disengagement), exclusive aspiration to material welfare (which we deplore under the term of materialism), and submission to the desires of others, aggregated into injunctions of the public opinion or, perhaps more severely from now on, taking the form of ressentiments and of multiple and contradictory opinions urging us to adhere to others' desires unquestionably. Everyone possesses, or expects to legitimately possess, an equal power of being, by comparing oneself to everyone else, at the risk that, as Tocqueville feared, there is nothing left between oneself and everyone. For his part, Girard asserted, in response to Sartre: "Everyone thinks that he alone is condemned to hell, and that is what makes it hell."[62]

Almost two centuries after Tocqueville and forty years after the formulation of the third, and last, part of Girardian theory, the various avatars of the dictatorship of opinion—several flavors of populism, exacerbated individualism, social networks disseminating hate-filled influences, globalization under all its forms, the incapacity to collectively and effectively deal with the threats looming over the environment, etc.—expose a state that, to resume Tocqueville's terminology, is no longer a social one, a current state into which the four tendencies delineated by our two thinkers have converged: the undermining of the scapegoat mechanism once revealed, depriving us of an automatic stabilizer in front of violence; the equality of conditions (and thus of the power of being) legitimately claimed by all, at the risk of recurrent confrontations; the centralization, under the aegis of the state or of the "market," of most decisions; and, to conclude, the aggravation of the pathologies of mimetic desire up to their most harmful level within everyone.

Will the Providence and the Revelation, therefore the Apocalypse, come together in order to guide us toward a favorable outcome? This will require novel tendencies, at the very least strong and simultaneous inflections, which appear to experience difficulties in emerging and which are still to be identified. It could be up to a Girardian-Tocquevillian thought, combined, if need be, with several other long-term tendencies, to detect their very beginnings and to strengthen their trajectories, which, without doubt, shall pass through a resort to the political, relying, at least to a certain extent, on Tocqueville.

NOTES

1. Tocqueville's corpus is limited, mainly, to three volumes: *Democracy in America* (the first volume in 1835 and the second volume in 1840), bilingual edition (French/English), ed. Eduardo Nolla, trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., 1990) and *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution* (1856), ed. and trans. Gerald Bevan (London: Penguin, 2008). To these are added the *Recollections*, various speeches, and several short essays connected with his political career. In order to facilitate the search for the source of the quotations, whatever the consulted edition might be (for they are numerous), the part, the chapter, and even the section are mentioned in each footnote providing a reference.

2. René Girard, with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London: Continuum, 2007). See Charles Ramond, "Théorie mimétique et philosophie—Hommage à René Girard," *Diacrítica* 30, no. 2 (2016): 135–58.

3. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1966), chapter 5, 136.

4. Raymond Aron, Claude Lefort, Pierre Manent, Marcel Gauchet, and François Furet would later publish works in relation to the Tocquevillian theories of democracy, liberalism, and the French Revolution.

5. Checked on a copy of this unpublished work deposited at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), in Paris. The topic of this thesis in contemporary history, defended in 1950 at Indiana University, had nonetheless created a sort of filiation with *Democracy in America*, a work comparing the American and French political systems and mores: the same idea of a transatlantic crossing of viewpoints, the same feeling of expatriation, the same work on first-hand contemporary sources, etc.

6. John Elster, *Alexis de Tocqueville: The First Social Scientist* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

7. René Girard, *De la violence à la divinité* (Paris: Grasset, 2007, 13). This is a singlevolume French edition of *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*; *Violence and the Sacred*; *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*; and *The Scapegoat*.

8. Even if he was a careful reader of great philosophers.

9. René Girard, *Mimesis & Theory. Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953–2005* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 42–49.

10. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1:4.

11. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 137.

12. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2:931.

13. Ibid., 945.

14. Ibid., 946.

15. "In France, the rediscovery, or rather the all-too-belated discovery, of Tocqueville, is a sign of this model's influence [English and/or American model], which is gaining more and more ground on homegrown Jacobinism, not only in the public's mind but also in political and administrative circles. Since the shift is happening via first-rate French adherents, like Tocqueville himself, it's not perceived as a foreign import. The English model implies no particular economic system." René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 80.

16. "If ever there was a mimetic writer, it's Tocqueville; and if there is a true science of politics, it begins with Tocqueville. It's only in the second volume of *Democracy in America* that Tocqueville

really comes to his own, by the way." René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 99.

17. "To be really for the Democracy means seeing the dangers of democracy. Tocqueville is quite sophisticated on this score and most of what he said is still true. He pointed out the dangers of democracy with striking intellectual clarity. If one covers up those dangers, society becomes like Soviet Union, whose favourite system was a single house, a totally powerful mob of representatives that would be completely swayed by mimetic imbalance. To be democratic is to look for a division of powers, bicameralism, checks and balances, etc. It is important to see the dangers of mass societies and to try to counter them as effectively as possible. Mimetic theory is a real contribution to this understanding." Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 179.

18. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 12 and 54. Finally, a remark by Germaine de Staël makes him think about Tocqueville: "In France it seems that the spirit of imitation is like a social link, and that all would be in disorder if the link did not make up for the instability of institutions" (167).

19. Girard also shows a certain discomfort with the French intellectual world in the wake of the Second World War, notably among the surrealists, with whom he had rubbed shoulders for a while, whereas Tocqueville disregards the new king of the French, crowned in 1830. They also share a nostalgia for aristocracy.

20. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1:16.

21. "I have been guided by the idea of contributing to real science of man, or rather a science of human relationships." Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 105.

22. Eduardo Nolla, foreword to *Democracy in America*, 1:l.

23. Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, 99–100.

24. Girard draws a parallel between the Tocquevillian unrest and the Stendhalian vanity, "sad and suspicious; it has a terrible fear of ridicule," in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 21. Thus characterized by the fear of ridicule, the nineteenth-century vanity seen by Stendhal is a manifestation of the lack of being, hardly disguised by the conceit that it displays.

25. Girard, *De la violence à la divinité*, 13.

26. Several less influential ones could also be added: provincialism, membership in the Académie Française, international recognition manifesting itself at an earlier date and in a stronger manner than the national one, in particular, a long-lasting disinterest, indeed ostracism, from French universities, etc.

27. For instance, "René Girard politique," in *Cités* 53, no. 1 (2013): 3–137.

28. Deposited at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.

29. In a letter written in 1835 to his friend, Louis de Kergorlay, in Nolla, foreword to *Democracy in America*, xlviii.

30. Since the early 1980s, shortly after the publication of *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, Paul Dumouchel, André Orléan, and Michel Aglietta have started an actualization of mimetic theory in the field of economics.

31. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1:316.

32. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2:946.

33. Ibid., 761.

34. Ibid.,1203.

35. Ibid.

36. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 117–18.

37. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1:207.

38. Ibid., 206.

39. Ibid., 13–14.

40. Ibid., 45–73.

41. Ibid., 92–93.

42. Ibid., 577.

43. James T. Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville's Democracy in America* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., 2000), 15 and 329.

44. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1:149–50.

45. Letter from Jefferson to Madison (March 15, 1789), in Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2:426.

46. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1:445.

47. Ibid., 376.

48. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2:900.

49. Ibid., 902.

50. Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, book 1, 23.

51. Girard detects it in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 137: "Stendhal, Flaubert, Tocqueville describe as 'republican' or 'democratic' an evolution which we today would call totalitarian."

52. A search for the frequency of these words in Tocqueville's works has been extended to the following synonyms: bitterness, animosity, antipathy, aversion, anger, disgust, spite, hate, hostility, malevolence, retaliation, revenge, and vengeance.

53. Tocqueville, *Oeuvres majeures*, éditions La Bibliothèque Digitale, 685ff.

54. It is worth noting that Tocqueville—just like Girard, Rousseau, and so many others—also starts from an original equality. In his *Memoir on Pauperism*, using a vocabulary specific to his age, he contends: "Savages are equal because they are equally weak and ignorant. Very civilised men can all become equal because they all have at their disposal similar means of attaining comfort and happiness," (20).

55. For instance, Paul Dumouchel, Wolfgang Palaver, and Roberto Farneti.

56. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Economy and the Future: A Crisis of Faith*, trans. Malcolm B. DeBevoise (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 57–58: "Planning in France until the mid-1980s aimed . . . at 'achieving by concerted deliberation and study an image of the future that is sufficiently optimistic to be desirable and sufficiently credible to give rise to actions that will bring about its own realization.'"

57. Ibid., 60–61.

58. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2:718–19.

59. Dupuy, *Economy and the Future*, 61.

60. Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 198), 174.

61. Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, book 3, 162.

62. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 57.

Søren Kierkegaard

Charles K. Bellinger

SØREN KIERKEGAARD AND RENÉ GIRARD ARE BOTH WIDELY READ AND influential authors in the contemporary academic world,[1] but they are only rarely discussed in relation to each other. This situation could and should be different because the two authors share certain core assumptions about the human condition, and the cross-fertilization of their ideas is potentially very fruitful. Both authors, for example, ground their message in the idea that the motivations of human beings are usually hidden from themselves and that recognizing this hiddenness requires reflection into the deepest wellsprings of violence in human culture. To understand oneself more clearly requires a transformed relationship with one's own personhood. It is only through this dynamic of conversion that the individual will gain some distance from the violence that forms and sustains human culture. In this essay, I will touch on some aspects of Kierkegaard's thought and show how it is in tune with and in some ways expands upon Girard's concerns.[2]

Girard's Comments on Kierkegaard

Before I begin the presentation of those aspects of Kierkegaard's thought that are most relevant to the dialogue with Girard, I will briefly summarize the comments that Girard made about him, which can be described in general as passing comments. Girard never wrote a substantial essay or book chapter on Kierkegaard, most likely because he did not study the Dane's authorship in depth, as he did many other authors, such as Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Dostoevsky. In *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*,

Girard says that "Dostoevsky's consciousness, like Kierkegaard's Self, cannot exist without an external prop."[3] By the end of this chapter, I hope to convince my reader that if Girard had studied Kierkegaard more deeply during those early years, he could have been included as a sixth author in *Deceit*, in that Kierkegaard also saw and analyzed mimetic desire. In the essay "Camus's Stranger Retried," published in 1964, Girard says that "even more relevant here than a purely psychiatric interpretation are the passages of *The Sickness unto Death* dedicated to what Kierkegaard calls 'defiance,' or 'the despair of willing despairingly to be oneself.'" This sentence is followed by a long quotation from *Sickness* describing a personality type that clings to torment and pain, rejecting the possibility of help and redemption from God, because that would require giving up self-sufficiency. Girard continues, "The absurd of which Kierkegaard is speaking, needless to say, is not Camus's *absurde*. . . . The young Camus thought he could dispose of Kierkegaard in a few sentences but Kierkegaard on Camus goes much deeper, paradoxically, than Camus on Kierkegaard. . . . Camus's *Sisyphe*, like *Teste*, is a 'rationalization' of Kierkegaardian despair, whereas *L'Etranger* is the esthetic, or naive and, as such, most revealing expression of that same despair."[4] Girard clearly views Kierkegaard's grasp of human psychology to be superior to that of Camus, but we are left wondering why, if that is the case, Girard never wrote a substantive essay on Kierkegaard that would clearly show the nature and extent of Girard's agreement with Kierkegaard. An essay also from 1964, this time on "Racine, Poet of Glory," includes comments on Kierkegaard's spheres of existence: "Like Kierkegaard's esthete, the young Racine, a rebel, a bachelor, and Don Juan, believes that there is nothing higher than art. However, the bitter irony of the tragic vision already makes the call to ethics heard from within aesthetics itself. In 1677, Racine responds to this call. He renounces theater and starts a family; he takes on the responsibilities of a husband, a father, and a citizen with the utmost seriousness."[5] A 1965 essay on "Bastards and the Antihero in Sartre" contains two passing references to Kierkegaard. Girard discusses again the concept of defiant despair, as in the essay on Camus, this time in relation to Sartre: "Kierkegaard also speaks of metaphysical despair, and the expression should not shock us under the pretext that it brings with it a psychological content quite different from the serenity Sartre displayed—as he informs us—during the period when he was bemoaning the

wretchedness of the human condition. Kierkegaardian despair is the motor of psychological operations that are designed precisely to eliminate this psychological content."[6] Girard seems to be referring here to Kierkegaard's formula for the complete uprooting of despair: "In relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it."[7] Girard continues that it is "to avoid despair, in the ordinary sense of the term, that Jean-Paul Sartre divinizes his disillusion and inverts all of his earlier values. Rejecting the modalities that formerly applied to the heroic being, Sartre endeavors to conquer a new—completely ideal—one, which is defined by a negation and a renunciation of heroism itself." Toward the end of the essay, Girard says that "Sartrean self-criticism claims to be inspired by Marx and Freud, but it is also linked to Kierkegaardian meditations on the ethical meaning of aesthetics and to the great quixotic interrogation of writing."[8] Comments such as these from Girard's early period show that he was aware of Kierkegaard's work, and referred to him, along with Dostoevsky, as an important Christian thinker who can be used to critique some of the false trails down which certain modern thinkers have travelled.

We note that there are no references to Kierkegaard in *Violence and the Sacred, Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, and the book on *Job*. In *The Scapegoat*, Girard comments on the Gerasene demoniac: "Quoting Kierkegaard, 'the mob is the lie,' Starobinski notes that evil in the Gospels is always on the side of plurality and the crowd."[9] I will discuss more fully the essay by Kierkegaard being referred to here later in this chapter. Girard's foreword to Robert Hamerton-Kelly's *The Gospel and the Sacred* says this: "Mimetic theory is too realistic and commonsensical to be confused with one more nihilistic stepchild of German idealism. And yet, unlike the positivistic social sciences, it is not blind to paradox; it can articulate the intricacies of human relations just as effectively as a Kierkegaard or a Dostoievsky."[10] In *The Girard Reader*, from 1996, there is an interview of Girard by James Williams, in which Williams suggests that Girard is not "distinguishing different kinds of mimesis. . . . Mimesis is always along a continuum." Girard replies: "That's right. It is something that involves the whole personality. . . . Maybe the idea of Kierkegaard, the idea of subjectivity as passionate inwardness and choice would be helpful. . . . I don't know; whatever the term, something bigger and other

than ‘desire’ should be used. ‘Desire’ has, necessarily, that narrow libidinal connotation.”[11] In *Evolution and Conversion*, from 2007, Girard’s interlocutors ask him about imitation and repetition in Aristotle, and Girard replies that “there is a text by Kierkegaard which seems to suggest a connection between mimesis and repetition, both in poetic terms and in the idea of reciprocal imitation and the emergence of doubles.”[12] The footnote to this passage indicates that Girard was thinking of Kierkegaard’s book *Repetition*. In 2005, Girard was interviewed by the French magazine *Nouvelle Revue Certitudes*. He is presented the question: “From the moment the founding murder leads to sacrifice, and we recede from the original murder, sacrifice tends to transform itself into a ritual, a less and less violent institution?” He responds: “The sacrifice gets institutionalized by changing the victim—I admire what Kierkegaard says on Abraham’s sacrifice.” This is followed by a general discussion of ancient Judaism and the phenomenon of child sacrifice, but there is no extended commentary on Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*.[13]

Kierkegaard’s Idea of Growth into Maturity

I turn now to a presentation of some of Kierkegaard’s central ideas, as a basis for placing them in dialogue with Girard’s. Kierkegaard’s message can be distilled into three main themes: what is wrong with human beings, the process of psychological growth that remedies this wrongness, and the call to “love the neighbor as oneself” that will be heard by the person who is growing psychologically. Let us look at each of these in turn.

The most important text that explicates the first point is *The Sickness unto Death*. The first half of this dense and striking treatise focuses on “despair” understood psychologically; the second half focuses on “sin,” which is the same concept as “despair,” but this time understood theologically. Human beings are in despair because they exist in a state of resistance to the possibility of their own growth into psychological maturity; the text describes this resistant state as “not willing to become oneself.” Because the human condition consists of existence within polarities (the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, freedom and necessity), to not become oneself in a true and authentic way means to refuse to hold the poles together in a creative tension. Thus, Kierkegaard

describes how an individual may fly off into the "infinite" and avoid the "finite," or vice versa. The many different ways that human beings can avoid growth into maturity accounts for the many different forms of distorted psychology that we see around us in the modern world.

A deep point of contact with Girard's thought is seen in Kierkegaard's argument that, when human beings are fleeing from the possibility of growth, they huddle together in groups, forming alliances, crowds, mobs. For example:

> Whereas one kind of despair plunges wildly into the infinite and loses itself, another kind of despair seems to permit itself to be tricked out of its self by "the others." Surrounded by hordes of men, absorbed in all sorts of secular matters, more and more shrewd about the ways of the world—such a person forgets himself, forgets his name divinely understood, does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man.[14]

This flight into "safety" by joining a crowd is not a mere human foible, an innocuous trait of human psychology; it is actually the engine that drives violence. Kierkegaard recognizes this in *The Sickness unto Death* by arguing that, when the ideal of selfhood is presented to human beings in the person of Christ, he is killed. The crowd seeks to "stick together" and to defend itself against the call to growth in selfhood, but "should there happen to be an individual who dares to speak otherwise . . . then let us protect ourselves by regarding him as mad or, if necessary, by putting him to death. If many of us do it, then there is no wrong. It is nonsense, an antiquated notion, that the many can 'do wrong.'"[15] The psychological need of crowds to attack scapegoats arises out of the resistance of the individuals who make up the crowd to move forward into the process of psychological maturation.

There are various places in Kierkegaard's authorship where he speaks of the process of growth in selfhood, but I will concentrate my necessarily brief remarks here on *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, part 1, which is often referred to as "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing." This lengthy sermonic treatise calls its reader to cease trying to hide in the crowd, to desist from evading the task of becoming an individual before God. "The eternal," meaning the judgment of the individual spiritually and ethically, is the end of all evasions, all excuses, all ability to stick together with others in a group. Before the Creator, "the individual looks around in

vain for the crowd."[16] The concept of "purity of heart" means the maturation and unification of the self that is only made possible by becoming a "single individual." In the language of *The Sickness unto Death*, which was written later, this maturation is "becoming oneself before God." Many readers of Kierkegaard encounter this theme in his writings and immediately jump to the accusation that he is guilty of atomistic "individualism." This is a mistaken critique when we consider *Works of Love*, which we will turn to next, but, even in "Purity of Heart," Kierkegaard anticipates and heads off this criticism:

> *And what is your frame of mind toward others?* Are you in harmony with everyone—by willing one thing? Or are you divisively in a faction, or are you at loggerheads with everyone and everyone with you? Do you want for everyone what you want for yourself, or do you want the highest for yourself, for yourself and for yours, or that you and yours shall be highest? Do you do to others what you want others to do to you—by willing one thing? This willing is the eternal order that orders everything, that brings you into harmony with the dead and with the people you never saw, with strange people whose language and customs you do not know, with all the people on the whole earth, who are blood relatives and eternally related to divinity by eternity's task to will one thing.[17]

Kierkegaard quite clearly argues here that the "alliances" and "crowds" people form in their attempt to evade becoming single individuals are always partial, rejecting an ethical stance toward the "universally human."

In Kierkegaard's main ethical treatise, *Works of Love*, he paints two pictures: how human beings act when they are defiantly remaining psychologically immature and how human beings act when they are open to growth in the direction of becoming genuine individuals. He describes these possibilities under the headings of "preferential love" and "divine love"—that love that flows out of hearing the command: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." *Preferential love* means loving those who are similar to us, those who feed and reinforce our egoism. *Commanded divine love* is love for all human beings without partiality and without expecting gain for ourselves.[18] He refers to the parable of the Good Samaritan as a key example, noting that Jesus turned around the lawyer's question by asking, "Which one of these three proved to be a neighbor?"[19] Those who are open to psychological growth act as neighbors to others and, at the same time, recognize all other human beings as neighbors to them. In other words, the category *neighbor* comes into existence in response to the divine command and has both subjective and objective facets. Under the regime of

preferential love, the *neighbor* cannot truly exist; there are only friends and enemies.

Having outlined the heart of Kierkegaard's anthropological vision, let us transition now into a closer comparison with Girard's vision. As with books that display "gospel parallels," we can place passages from the two authors next to each other and see how close they were in many of their core ideas.

Mimetic Desire

The phrase most commonly connected with Girard's psychology is "mimetic desire." Kierkegaard did not use the Danish equivalent of that phrase, but it is clear that he saw the same phenomenon in human behavior and culture. He used the Danish word *Sammenligning*, translated into English as "comparison," to refer to a comparison of oneself with others that is one aspect of human behavior under the regime of psychological immaturity. It is a looking around at others with envy because one lacks a psychological and spiritual unity within oneself. Kierkegaard often employed parables to illustrate his message, and one of the more memorable is the parable of the worried lily. A common lily lived among assorted other flowers and plants. One day, a bird came along and told the lily that in another place there were beautiful crown imperial lilies that were much more impressive. The worried lily asked the bird to peck away the soil around its roots and carry it away to the place where the more beautiful lilies lived. "Alas, on the way the lily withered" and died. Kierkegaard explains the parable: "The lily is the human being. The naughty little bird is the restless mentality of comparison, which roams far and wide, fitfully and capriciously, and gleans the morbid knowledge of diversity; and just as the bird did not put itself in the lily's place, comparison does the same thing by either putting the human being in someone else's place or putting someone else in his place."[20] In our state of immaturity, we are thin, insubstantial selves, living on the horizontal plane of social expectations and fashions. We are blown here and there by the winds of the crowd, the mass, the horde of similarly insubstantial selves that surround us:

> It indeed seems as if in order to begin to be oneself, a human being first of all must be furnished with what the others are and by that find out then what he himself is—in order then to be that. But if he falls into the snare of this optical illusion, he will never become

himself . . . From "the others" a person of course actually finds out only what the others are —it is in this way that the world wants to deceive a person out of becoming himself. "The others" in turn do not know what they themselves are either but continually know only what "the others" are.[21]

Kierkegaard's message in this discourse is that it is through the vertical relationship with God that a person finds his or her true sense of self, meaning, purpose, contentment in life; "one cannot be oneself merely by being before others" on the horizontal plane. Compare this passage in Girard:

When modern theorists envisage man as a being who knows what he wants, or who at least possesses an "unconscious" that knows for him, they may simply have failed to perceive the domain in which human uncertainty is most extreme. Once his basic needs are satisfied (indeed, sometimes even before), man is subject to intense desires, though he may not know precisely for what. The reason is that he desires *being*, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks to that other person to inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire that being. If the model, who is apparently already endowed with superior being, desires some object, that object must surely be capable of conferring an even greater plenitude of being.[22]

This passage leads me to assert that summaries of Girard's thought should begin with the concept of *lack*, not with the concept of *mimetic desire*, because it is this sense of lack that is the deep existential root of the phenomenon of acquisitive mimesis. This passage from *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* is also exactly on point:

RENÉ GIRARD: No one can see that the true nature of violence is deduced with implacable logic, from the simple and single rule of the Kingdom. No one can see that disobeying or obeying this rule gives rise to two kingdoms which cannot communicate with one another, since they are separated by a real abyss. Mankind can cross this abyss, but to do so all men together should adopt the single rule of the Kingdom of God. The decision to do so must come from each individual *separately*, however; for once, others are not involved.

JEAN-MICHEL OUGHOURLIAN: If we follow your reasoning, the real human subject can only come out of the rule of the Kingdom; apart from this rule, there is never anything but mimetism and the "interdividual." Until this happens, the only subject is the mimetic structure.

RENÉ GIRARD: That is quite right . . .[23]

"Interdividuality" is a term coined by Girard that indicates a psychological state of social entanglement that is so thorough that it entails a *lack* of

selfhood, a *deficiency* of genuine subjectivity and self-awareness. The same message is communicated very clearly by Kierkegaard:

> As an individual you are eternally obliged to make an accounting of your opinion, of your judgment. And in eternity you will not be pryingly and busily asked, as by a journalist, whether there were a great many who had the same—wrong opinion, but only whether you had it; whether you have pamperingly accustomed your soul to judge light-mindedly and unthinkingly along with the others because the crowd judged unthinkingly; whether you perhaps have corrupted the better part in you by boasting along with the crowd that you were many and that you were justified because you were many, that is, you were many who were wrong.[24]

The Crowd Is Untruth

In Girard's essay, "The First Stone," he contrasts the miracle worker Apollonius of Tyana, who spurs a crowd to stone to death a beggar, with Jesus, who saves the woman caught in adultery from being stoned to death. Girard says that after the crowd disperses one by one, beginning with the eldest, "Instead of the mindless uniformity of the mob, we watch genuine individuals emerging from the crowd. The Gospel text can be read almost allegorically, as the emergence of genuine personhood out of the primordial mob."[25] This echoes precisely the repeated theme in Kierkegaard that the Gospel message disperses the violent crowd and leads human beings to become individuals before God. The two authors are calling attention to the link between hypocritical self-righteousness and the violence of crowds.

Kierkegaard wrote an important essay on this theme: "the crowd is untruth."[26] He begins with the observation that there is "a view of life which holds that where the crowd is, the truth is also"; there is another view, however, "which holds that wherever the crowd is, there is untruth." A crowd, he argues, is in its very concept untruth, regardless of whether it consists of "the lowly or the nobles," because it "renders the single individual wholly unrepentant and irresponsible." No one, as an individual, would have the courage to walk up to Christ and spit on him, but "since they remain in a crowd, they have the courage for it—what frightening untruth."

"The crowd is untruth. There is therefore no one who has more contempt for what it is to be a human being than those who make it their profession to lead the crowd. . . . For to win a crowd is not so great a trick; one only

needs some talent, a certain dose of untruth and a little acquaintance with the human passions." When I read these words, I cannot help but to see them as a prophetic anticipation of Adolf Hitler and his rallies.[27] I recall also, with agreement, a statement I heard once from Bruce Kirmmse, a leading Kierkegaard scholar, who said that he viewed Kierkegaard as the most antifascist thinker in the modern world. The "witness for the truth," Kierkegaard continues, will "talk with each privately, on the streets and lanes—to split up the crowd, or to talk to it, not to form a crowd, but so that one or another individual might go home from the assembly and become a single individual." The untruth that inheres in the existence of the crowd is its exclusion of God and the "neighbor," interpreting this term in the sense conveyed in the divine command to love the neighbor as oneself. The crowd thus cannot recognize genuine human equality: "everyone who is really aware," Kierkegaard says, "that the task is to love the neighbor, he is also aware of what human equality is."

If We Had Lived during the Days of Our Fathers

One of the most important passages in the gospels for Girard is found in Matthew 23, along with its parallel in Luke 11:

> Now it is the Christians who say: *If we had lived in the days of our Jewish fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of Jesus*. If the people whom Jesus addresses and who do not listen to him fulfill the measure of their fathers, then the Christians who believe themselves justified in denouncing these same people in order to exculpate themselves are fulfilling a measure that is already full to overflowing. They claim to be governed by the text that reveals the process of misunderstanding, and yet they repeat that misunderstanding. With their eyes fixed on the text, they do once again what the text condemns.[28]

In Kierkegaard's critique of Christendom toward the end of his life, he focused on this same text in his important essay: "What Christ Judges of Official Christianity." He suggested that pastors in Denmark should be required to read this passage from the Gospel aloud from the pulpit, stand silently for five minutes, and then sit down.[29] He comments:

> At the root of "Christendom" is the truth: the human being is a born hypocrite. The Christianity of the New Testament was the truth. But people sagaciously and knavishly invented a new kind of Christianity, one that builds the tombs of the prophets and adorns the

> graves of the righteous and says: If we had lived in the days of our fathers. And this is what Christ calls blood-guilt.
>
> What Christianity wants is: imitation. What the human being does not want is to suffer, least of all the kind of suffering that is authentically Christian, to suffer at the hands of people. So he discards imitation and thereby suffering, the distinctly Christian suffering. Then he builds the tombs of the prophets—that is one thing. And then he lies to God, to himself, to others, and says that he is better than those who put the prophets to death—that is the next. Hypocrisy first and hypocrisy last—and according to Christ's judgment: blood-guilt.[30]

Kierkegaard had come to the same view of Christian history that Girard would later articulate in the terms of his own theory:

> Thanks to the sacrificial reading it has been possible for what we call Christendom to exist for fifteen or twenty centuries; that is to say, a culture has existed that is based, like all cultures (at least up to a certain point) on the mythological forms engendered by the founding mechanism. Paradoxically, in the sacrificial reading the Christian text itself provides the basis. Mankind relies upon a misunderstanding of the text that explicitly reveals the founding mechanism to re-establish cultural forms which remain sacrificial and to engender a society that, by virtue of this misunderstanding, takes its place in the sequence of all other cultures, still clinging to the sacrificial vision that the Gospel rejects.[31]

The purpose of this string of parallels is to show that in many cases what Girard argues is almost directly echoing what Kierkegaard had said. We cannot gain from the passing comments by Girard on Kierkegaard surveyed above an exact knowledge of which books by the Dane he had read, beyond the small number referred to. We cannot say therefore that there was a direct influence with regard to all the concepts mentioned, but if not, then there was a convergence of insights that was based on reading carefully and deeply the same key text: the Bible. Echoing *Deceit*'s "unity of novelistic conclusions," we could call it a "unity of anthropological insights."

Kierkegaard on Violence

While most readers of Kierkegaard focus on philosophical or theological ideas in his writings, he was also a psychologist and a sociologist before those disciplines were formally included in the fields of higher education. He was intensely interested in the phenomenon of violence, focusing on the beating and crucifixion of Christ; like Girard, he saw that episode not as unique in human history but as representative of violence more generally. In *Two Ages*, for example, he recounts witnessing a street fight in Copenhagen

in which three men were ganging up against a lone victim. A crowd formed and became indignant about the mismatch. The crowd then beat up the three assailants. Kierkegaard tried to explain to one of the avengers the irony in the situation, but he had no success.[32]

Girard focuses on the arbitrariness of the selection of the sacrificial victim. The scapegoat may have characteristics that set him or her apart, such as being a twin, walking with a limp, being a foreigner, and so forth, yet in a particular act of scapegoating the choice of victim is arbitrary, in that one foreigner may be killed while another is spared, for no apparent reason. The psychological need of the crowd is for a victim, *any* victim. Kierkegaard's theory of violence, on the other hand, because of its theological orientation, sees those who mediate the divine call to spiritual growth as the victims who most clearly reveal the deepest motivations of human violence. The prophets, Christ, and St. Stephen the proto-martyr are paradigmatic here; in our age: Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Oscar Romero. Consider this passage from Kierkegaard's journals, titled "How Did It Happen That Christ Was Put to Death?":

> I can answer this in such a way that with the same answer I show what Christianity is.
>
> What is "spirit"? (And Christ is indeed spirit, his religion is of the spirit.) Spirit is: to live as if dead (to die to the world).
>
> So far removed is this mode of existence from the natural man that it is quite literally worse for him than simply dying.
>
> The natural man can tolerate it for an hour when it is introduced very guardedly at the distance of the imagination—yes, then it even pleases him. But if it is moved any closer to him, so close that it is presented in dead earnestness as a demand upon him, then the self-preservation instinct of the natural life is aroused to such an extent that it becomes a regular fury, as happens through drinking, or as they say, a *furor uterinus*. In this state of derangement he demands the death of the man of spirit or rushes upon him to slay him.[33]

Those who mediate the divine call to spiritual growth are singled out as recipients of the rage of fallen human beings who are in a state of mutiny against the call of redemption. This theme in Kierkegaard is shown to be fully compatible with the theological implications of Girard's thought by theologian James Alison, who writes that "these people are not just made uncomfortable by him [Jesus], but that they are in fact locked into a profound aversion to creation itself. They are clinging on to a form, futile, useless, and shot through with death, of incomplete creation, and resisting being completely created."[34]

Famous leaders such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are targeted but also less famous persons if they criticize a crowd intent on violence. Moderate Hutus were killed in Rwanda in 1994, for example, if they did not support the massacre of Tutsis. Those who sought peace within the context of ethnic and political tensions in Indonesia were sometimes assassinated. Tawfik Hamid recounts how his efforts to escape from the jihadist group he had been drawn into in Egypt led to an effort to literally stone him to death.[35]

Is Kierkegaard's theory of violence only useful in explaining these special cases of killing the messenger? I think not, for the following reason. The deep fabric of Kierkegaard's understanding of violence works with the idea that human selves are immature but have the possibility of becoming more mature. There is our current "self," in its small-mindedness and immaturity, and our potential future self, in its expanded openness to growth. The deepest root of violence is that our current self does not want to die to itself and undergo the possibility of conversion. Our current self "sees" the possible future self as a threat to be fended off; thus, we must expend our psychological energy continually fighting against becoming other to ourselves, dying and being reborn as a changed self. We "know not what we do" in the sense that this drama that is happening deep within our souls is inaccessible to us. We act, without being fully aware of what we are doing, fending off our own possible growth by transforming other human beings into phantom images of the more mature self that we are called to become and deflecting onto them our anger at the pressure that self places on us.[36] The self does not want to become an other to itself and this is played out in the world through attacks on other selves. God is calling us to live more fully into the *imago Dei*, which entails truly loving God and our neighbor as ourselves; we reject this call by hating and killing our neighbors. We cannot reach God to silence the call of creation, so we do what we can; we lay violent hands on other human beings who are created in the image of God. This is Kierkegaard's deep theory of violence, which works to explain violent acts in general, as well as suicide, and the "killing the messenger" form of violence (which reveals the psychological dynamics most clearly). While suicide is a complex phenomenon, there are certainly cases in which the person ends their life as an alternative to that "death to self" and openness to spiritual rebirth that religious tradition speaks of.

Differences between Kierkegaard and Girard

Girard's thought tends to limit itself to the horizontal plane of social relations, in the wake of the human fall into sin. Kierkegaard's thought provides us with deeper reflections on what it means to fall into sin, particularly in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness unto Death*, and it also provides us with much more extensive reflections on conversion, spiritual growth, and ethics in works such as "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing" and *Works of Love*. Girard's thought tends to avoid making ethical arguments, so his readers are left to work out the ethical implications of his thought on their own.[37] In Kierkegaard, I argue, there is a rich treatment of the many different aspects of philosophical and theological anthropology and ethics, not simply an intense focus on the horizontal plane of social psychology. Kierkegaard's thought as a whole subtly employs an "oscillating fan" vision of human existence. We are born into and socialized within a horizontal plane, a violent crowd of some sort. We are called to disentangle ourselves from that crowd and rise up into genuine selfhood and subjectivity. This rising up allows us to be vertically related to God and thus to truly hear the commandment, the "royal Law": "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."[38] We are then sent back down from the vertical to the horizontal, as changed agents who are able to be agents of change in the world. Starting from the horizontal plane, moving up through the experience of spiritual growth, hearing the voice of God, and then moving back down to the horizontal plane is the key oscillating movement of the human spirit at the deepest level of Kierkegaard's anthropology. Girard's thought is sometimes described as a "phenomenology of redemption," but it is my contention that the phenomenology in Kierkegaard is actually much richer.

For Kierkegaard, the Creator is always seeking to give genuine selfhood to human beings through the event of psychological and spiritual maturation, but we cannot receive this gift as long as we remain outside of ourselves, living mimetically in the crowd. This event of becoming truly human, gaining true subjectivity, is the heart of lived Christian faith.[39] This is the message of both Kierkegaard and Girard, but it is my contention that Girard's authorship lacks the fullness of articulation that Kierkegaard gives to this idea because Girard was so reticent to write as a theologian.

Another possible difference between these two authors concerns Girard's emphasis on the arbitrary nature of the choice of scapegoat, in contrast with Kierkegaard's "killing the messenger" theory. I don't see this as a deep disagreement but as a matter of emphasis. Girard would not say, of course, that Jesus Christ was killed arbitrarily. He recognizes that the satanic principle in human culture saw Christ as a threat. He was killed in a futile attempt to prevent the unveiling of the satanic lie. As I argued in the previous section, Kierkegaard's theory can be interpreted as offering an understanding of the dynamics of the crowd, which kills not just prophets but human beings in general when moral agents are spiritually immature. A more substantive difference between the two authors is that Kierkegaard did not engage in lengthy reflections on the archaic origins of human culture. The anthropological literature that Girard used in that regard had not been written yet.

Insight into Violence Comes from Above

I have been noting some differences between Kierkegaard and Girard, but there is one point at which they are clearly in agreement, and it is a very important point. Whenever there is a mass shooting or a terrorist attack of some sort, the press immediately begins to search for the "motives" of the violent agents. They look for online posts or verbal statements of support for certain groups or ideologies, as recounted by friends or family members. Books written by scholars, such as Mark Juergensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, take a similar approach, seeking motives in the thoughts that were in the minds of the violent agents.[40] Juergensmeyer travels the world to interview terrorists and their supporters in order to find out what they were thinking. In contrast, Kierkegaard and Girard are at a very deep level not interested in such thoughts, because a Christian interpretation of violence takes as its starting point a particular verse in the Bible: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Girard comments:

> Does the idea of the unconscious belong to the Gospels? . . . The sentence that defines the unconscious persecutor lies at the very heart of the Passion story in the Gospel of Luke: "Father, forgive them . . ." In this passage we are given the first definition of the unconscious in human history, that from which all the others originate and develop in weaker form.[41]

Kierkegaard, in *The Sickness unto Death*, analyses the various forms of "despair," psychological malformation, as a condition of which the despairing person is unconscious. The ideas in the heads of violent people are, in the final analysis, the ravings of the morally insane and a deep and truthful diagnosis of the situation is not going to come from the insane people themselves. The source of true insight is always transcendent; it is a *revelation* from above. This is the basic presupposition of Kierkegaard and Girard, and it stands as a profound critique of the assumption that is at work whenever people think that access to "motives" requires nothing more than awareness of the conscious thoughts or ideologies of those who are violent.

The Epistemology of Love

A key aspect of Girard's message in *Things Hidden* is the concept of the "epistemology of love":

> Love is at one and the same time the divine being and the basis of any real knowledge. The New Testament contains what amounts to a genuine epistemology of love, the principle of which is clearly formulated in the first Epistle of John: "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:10–11). . . . Love is the only true revelatory power because it escapes from, and strictly limits, the spirit of revenge and recrimination that still characterizes the revelation in our own world, a world in which we can turn that spirit into a weapon against our own doubles, as Nietzsche also showed.[42]

Similar thoughts were articulated by Kierkegaard. The passage "God is love" from the First Epistle of John was one of his favorite passages; he commented on it again and again.[43] He understood Christ to be the incarnation of God's love for humanity and thus the key to human self-understanding, the criterion for what it is to be a human person.[44] There is a memorable passage in *Practice in Christianity*, for example, in which he asks his reader to imagine a parent showing a child a series of pictures of notable figures from history, such as William Tell and Napoleon. Slipped among the pictures, there is an image of Christ on the cross, and the child is told that this was a form of punishment reserved for the worst criminals. The child asks what crime this man committed, and the parent says that

"this crucified man was the most loving person who ever lived."[45] The message that is supposed to be impressed upon the child is that in this fallen world "love is hated," a phrase that Kierkegaard employed repeatedly.[46]

Conversion

Jean-Michel Oughourlian sums up well the sense in which Girard is a theorist of conversion. Addressing Girard, he says:

> If I understand you properly, today there can be no real knowledge of mimetic desire and its victimage mechanisms without shattering what in each of us is still structured or is always trying to restructure itself in accordance with this desire and these mechanisms. That means that the awareness we have sought from the beginning of these discussions is only truly accessible through an experience similar to what has traditionally been called religious *conversion*, though there may be no reason to avoid describing it in rational terms at the same time.[47]

The central message of Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* is that conversion is necessary for human beings to gain an ability to see their entanglement in the web of mimetic desire. Girard's interpretation of history maintains that certain key verses in the Bible are the engine driving a slow, subtle, unseen but nevertheless powerful epistemological conversion of humanity over more than three millennia. We now cannot avoid seeing the world through the lens of concern for victims. Conversion is also at the core of Kierkegaard's vision and message, as we have seen, and he is drawing on precisely the same biblical tradition.

We have noted that there are many key ideas in these two authors that are so similar as to be almost identical. Girard only rarely referred to Kierkegaard in his writings, but those references do indicate a positive attitude of general agreement. Tracing the influence of one thinker on another is not always an easy task, but we can say with confidence that if Girard had explicitly turned his attention to Kierkegaard as he was writing *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, the Danish author could have been a sixth major voice included in that book. While not a "novelist" in exactly the same sense as Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard was a writer of "novelistic" philosophical works, an anthropological theorist, and a theologian who shed light on the dynamics of conversion. Kierkegaard saw the same entanglement of human beings with others on the horizontal plane that

Girard came to call “mimetic desire” and offered profound reflections on the phenomenon of violence that can and ought to be brought into conversation with Girard’s reflections.

Dead Men Talking

The phrase “dead men talking” has a triple meaning in the following paragraphs, as will become clear. Using the WorldCat database as a source of information, there were 1,567 books with “Søren Kierkegaard” as a subject heading published between the years 2015 to 2022, with more than nine hundred of those being written in English. There is, of course, also a huge stream of articles and dissertations being written about him, all over the world, every year. Some scholars devote their whole lives to studying his thought. It is clear that there is a power in his ideas, a voice that people pay attention to, with the goal of interpreting and conveying that voice to a contemporary audience. My main thesis in this essay has been that Kierkegaard’s thought world and Girard’s share many points of commonality, so that considering the two together is a very fruitful exercise. Kierkegaard died in 1855, but, as is the case with other authors, be they Martin Luther or Thomas Aquinas or Augustine or Plato, he has the ability to speak to us today and for the foreseeable future, because there is a power in words and ideas that holds a continual fascination for us as human beings. Girard is known for saying that the Bible was not only ahead of its time—it is still ahead of our time (in its anthropological understanding). The same can be said of Kierkegaard, precisely because he was such a deep reader of the Bible.

The sense in which Girard is a dead man talking is the same as I was just saying with regard to Kierkegaard. Girard’s ideas are fascinating to people from many different academic fields and philosophical worldviews, and that will remain the case into the future. But there is another, more explicit, sense in which I can present Girard’s voice to the reader of this essay; I will publish here for the first time portions of correspondence between Girard and myself.

It will help my reader to have some background regarding how I came to associate these two authors in my own intellectual journey. During my college years, which were the early 1980s, I was exposed to authors who

wrote on the subject of the ethics of warfare and also on social scientific perspectives on the question: "Why are human beings violent?" I was reading many different authors, presenting many different theories, until I read Kierkegaard and had a "light bulb" moment in seeing how his understanding of despair as the refusal to grow toward maturity could be used as a basis for understanding the roots of violence. I was thus an avid reader of Kierkegaard first, before I was exposed to Girard's ideas, which happened when I took a course in graduate school taught by Mark Juergensmeyer. He assigned *Violence and the Sacred*. At the time, I didn't fully understand what I was reading, but Girard himself came to Berkeley, California, and gave a lecture, which I attended. In the lecture he spoke about mimetic desire, the scapegoat mechanism, and how the Bible enables us to see those phenomena. I was very impressed by the lecture and went on to read Girard's works extensively, and eventually wrote my dissertation on Søren Kierkegaard and René Girard.

During the 1990s, I sent Girard an essay I had published that expressed the germinal ideas that would later become my dissertation.[48] In the essay I said this:

> Among the various attempts to understand political violence of which I am aware René Girard's is the most impressive and thought-provoking. His writings are justly described as having an epochal place in social science, and in general I find myself in agreement with his theses, to the extent that I can grasp them. My criticism of Girard is, however, that he is stronger in "social psychology" than in "individual psychology"; that is, his sociological edifice seems to lack the understanding of individual motivation which I have been attempting to articulate in this paper. Kierkegaard's dictum, "the crowd is untruth," is the perfect epigraph for Girard's work, but an understanding of the "untruthfulness" of the individuals who make up the crowd is only vaguely presented there, in the presupposition of a "desire" which drives the mechanism of mimeticism. In the end it seems that Girard's doctrine of sin is essentially Socratic: sin is ignorance, unconsciousness of the scapegoat mechanism. For a deeper understanding of sin, we must turn to Kierkegaard. From him we can learn that the "social crisis" which is resolved through the "scapegoat mechanism" is in reality the crisis of human existence before God, the crisis of creation. Sin is flight from the possibility of new creation.
>
> In fairness to Girard, I must say that he realizes very clearly that the key to the whole problem is found in the Prologue of John, but he writes in the genre of sociological theory rather than the genre of theology, which prevents him from speaking as freely as he might of the Incarnation of the Word of God in human history. The central point of the preceding criticisms [of Carl Jung, Ernest Becker, and Alice Miller] is that it is not possible to understand human violence without acknowledging that human beings are addressed by the Word of God, and live their lives in reaction to this Word. I believe that Girard would agree with this statement.[49]

Girard responded via letter:

> I find your paper quite perceptive and I truly enjoyed it. I agree with your analysis of Kierkegaard and I think your statement about my work is not unfair. It is true that my approach, fundamentally, is sociological and that means, of course, that religious postulates should be avoided. This is a convention of the genre which I have not always respected and which I respect less and less.
>
> I feel it is important to show without religious assumptions, that the intellectual force of the Christian message can be shown in a manner that should impress the unbeliever. There is always an apologetic dimension, I suppose, to my writing on Scripture.[50]

In April 1995, I sent Girard another letter that contained the outline of my dissertation proposal, and mentioning that I would be giving a paper on Kierkegaard at the June Colloquium on Violence and Religion in Chicago. He responded: "I liked the outline of your dissertation very much, especially your definition of the Cross, according to Kierkegaard, and all your quotes are fundamental for his relationship to mimetic desire—the whole conception of the crowd, and the idea of the self as coming out of the crowd. It makes me think of the adulterous woman in John, the first people who will not cast the first stone, knowing they are not unlike the adulterous woman, the oldest! It will be a pleasure to meet you in Chicago, next week!"[51] After I presented my paper, Girard came up to me and said that he agreed with what I had argued.[52]

In June 1999, I sent Girard the manuscript of my revised dissertation, which was being published, and I was delighted to (eventually) get a response, which is worth quoting at length because of the intriguing issues it raises:[53]

> My apologies—first for replying so late to your: *Genealogy of Violence*. I cannot keep up with my mail and the problem was made worse by my publishing a book in France last year [he is referring to *Je Vois Satan Tomber comme L'éclair* (*I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*)].
>
> I enjoyed your essay very much. I find it very convincing and well written. I agree with most of what you say, but I disagree with a few points, of course, and they are the points most worthy of comment, of course.
>
> You say I should "drop the pretense of adhering to the methodological atheism of social science." I am aware it is very difficult for people on both sides of this very important fence, religion here—the social sciences there—to understand what I am trying to do and I do not claim I have succeeded in doing it—but . . . I truly believe that an honest and painstaking effort to systematize archaic religion should lead one to the Cross and vice versa. Paul's belief that the Cross is the key to all knowledge is not true only of theology, it is true of man, of anthropology. . . . You write that I show in *The Scapegoat* that the scapegoat mechanism can be seen in full force during the "Christian" Middle Ages, *exactly as if the gospels had never been written.* I underline this phrase because I do not agree with it. We can see the

> functioning of the scapegoat much more clearly than in the worlds dominated by myths and rituals because the scapegoat system was being undermined and revealed at the time. That is why the medieval witchcraft epidemic is really the last one in the West and the beginning of a time when most people in the Christianized world will no longer believe in witches. What is new about the Middle Ages is that certain forms of scapegoating and persecution are spectacularly visible because they are on their way out and this is the result of Christianity. Before the Middle Ages witch hunting is not visible not because it is absent but because it is everywhere; it is not problematic at all.
>
> The failure of Christians to understand Christianity is tragic no doubt, but it is not different, *mutatis mutandis* from the failure of the Jews before, as stigmatized by the prophets. And this failure is not total. I am not sure we are able to assume a position of moral superiority toward the Christian past any more than toward archaic societies. Our attitude toward violence is a modern phenomenon totally dependent on Christianity, I feel, and we cannot project it back on the middle ages in order to condemn them. We owe everything we know to Christianity and it takes a very long time to assimilate and whatever we assimilate we usually turn into a weapon against others, a form of self-defense. I think we are entering a historical period during which the role of violence in the structures of human societies will become fully visible as an anthropological fact as well as a gift of the Christian revelation. And far from making us perfect, we will certainly manage to misuse the truth. Many thanks for sending me your [manuscript]. I especially appreciate the "mimesis" quotes from Kierkegaard, and also Voegelin whom I have been reading quite recently.[54]

I was hoping that Girard would, at some point in the following years, write a substantive essay on Kierkegaard, and another on Voegelin, but he did not do that. His comments in this letter are very interesting to consider, however. He focuses on my comment that the violence committed by Christians during the Middle Ages showed a lack of influence from the Gospels. I was referring to the anti-Semitic pogroms, such as those described by Guillaume de Machaut, as well as the Crusades, the burning of heretics at the stake, etc. That actions such as these are contradictory to the teachings and example of Christ is not a point that could rationally be disagreed with. His argument was that unethical violence committed by Christians was on the way out; I have no objection to this as a general principle, but he was aware, with the rest of us, that black persons were burned at the stake or hung from trees in twentieth century America. My point is normative, while he takes the discussion in the direction of historical interpretation.

It is interesting to note that in *Evolution and Conversion* Girard's interviewers present him a quotation from my book to solicit his response. The quotation was: "Girard ought to drop the pretense of adhering to the methodological atheism of social science, which has decreed that religious postulates are unacceptable foundations for understanding human behavior.

He ought to write straightforwardly as a Christian apologist and argue that a theological mode of knowing is required for real insight into human behavior."[55] I find Girard's response to be very interesting: "I don't subscribe to religious atheism, but I do think that the approach to facts in the social sciences should be devoid of both religious and anti-religious assumptions. To call this atheism is surely wrong. The religious minds are wrong in asking for a religious postulate. If you postulate the a priori truth of religion from the start, your reasoning would have a far weaker apologetic value. The mimetic theory has an apologetic value in terms of Christianity only if you assume all restrictions of knowledge of the scientific attitude."[56] I interpret this as an admission by Girard that he has always had a "Trojan horse" approach to apologetics. He presented a "secular" theory of mimetic desire and scapegoating first, to gain an audience in the scholarly world, and then he could speak about how the Bible is the key force in history unveiling the persecutory unconscious. He could write openly in *Things Hidden, The Scapegoat, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, and elsewhere concerning the divinity of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in history as the Paraclete, the Defender, who is working to undo the lies of the Satan, the Accuser. This comment by Girard on apologetics is interesting, but it is still not a focused response to the heart of my thesis concerning Kierkegaard's understanding of the roots of violence. The interviewers did not frame the discussion in that way. Nowhere does Girard ever object to my central thesis that the deepest root of violence is human resistance to the ongoing event of creation.

Which brings me to the third sense of the phrase "dead man talking" and the conclusion of this essay. The looming figure in Western civilization, which has to a great extent become world civilization, is the person of Jesus Christ. The choice of Salvador Dali's painting "Christ of St. John of the Cross" for the cover of Tom Holland's tome, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*, was entirely appropriate.[57] It is not only the crucifixion of Christ that has given us the revolutionary modern "concern for victims" and the human rights language of which Girard speaks; it is even more profoundly the New Testament witness to the resurrected Christ that is the engine driving moral progress in human history. The resurrected Christ speaks to us not breathing threats of vengeance, but rather unveiling the character of God as wholly non-rivalrous and thus peaceful and gracious. Girardian theologian James Alison makes this argument well

when he says that the "only real narrative of creation we have is the narrative of the collapse of an idolatrous picture of creation linked to an order which tends to crucify, and the birth of an entirely gratuitous notion of the Creator who calls his sons and daughters into being, out of nothing. . . . The doctrine of the creation and of the resurrection are the same doctrine."[58] The same God spoken of by Girard and Alison, the Creator who *is* love, also comes into articulation in the writings of Kierkegaard; this is my considered judgment, as one who has studied his writings extensively.

NOTES

1. "Surren Kyierkagoar" is a rough approximation, for English speakers, of how his name is pronounced by native Danish speakers. The word "kierkegaard" means literally "churchyard," and the first translation found in a Danish–English dictionary will be "cemetery."

2. My "A Very Short Life of Kierkegaard" can be found online at Christian Classics Eternal Library: https://www.ccel.org/k/kierkegaard/kierkegaard.htm.

3. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvone Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 58.

4. René Girard, *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 26–27.

5. René Girard, *Mimesis and Theory: Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953–2005* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 115.

6. Ibid., 145.

7. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Despair: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, trans. and ed. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 14.

8. Girard, *Mimesis and Theory*, 158.

9. René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 173–74.

10. Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), xi.

11. René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 268.

12. René Girard, with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London: Continuum, 2007), 111.

13. René Girard, Laurent Linneuil, and Abbé de Tanoüarn, "Facing the Devil's Test: The Truth according to René Girard," trans. Andreas Wilmes and David Dawson, *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, no. 2 (2017): 205, https://doi.org/10.22618/TP.PJCV.20171.2.245014.

14. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 33–34.

15. Ibid., 123.

16. Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, trans. and ed. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 129.

17. Ibid., 144.

18. Jonathan Edwards's *The Nature of True Virtue* makes a very similar argument here.

19. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. and ed. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 22.

20. Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 169.

21. Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses: The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, trans. and ed. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 39–40. See Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 16: "Subjectivisms and objectivisms, romanticisms and realisms, individualisms and scientisms . . . all defend the same illusion of autonomy to which modern man is passionately devoted."

22. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 145–46.

23. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 199.

24. Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 132.

25. René Girard, "The First Stone," *Renascence* 52, no. 1 (1999), 14.

26. I am using my own translation, which is available online at Christian Classics Eternal Library: https://www.ccel.org/ccel/kierkegaard/untruth/files/untruth.html. In the Princeton Series of Kierkegaard's Writings, it is in volume 22, *The Point of View*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 105–12.

27. See Gabriel Guedes Rossatti, "Kierkegaard, Hannah Arendt and the Advent of the 'Hollow Men' or towards a Kierkegaardian Reading of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2014*, edited by Heiko Schulz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 328: "Both Kierkegaard and Arendt comprehended, following Socrates, that *de-individualized* individuals whose habitat is modernity become liable to the commitment not only of 'radical evil,' but rather of 'infinite evil'; for, as Arendt discovered through Eichmann, 'the greatest evil perpetrated is the evil committed by nobodies, that is, human beings who refuse to be persons.'"

28. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 175.

29. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 132.

30. Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*, 135–36.

31. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 181.

32. Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age A Literary Review*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 86–87: "I once witnessed a fight in which three men shamefully mistreated a fourth. The crowd watched with indignation; their hostile muttering began to stir them to action: some of the crowd converged on one of the assailants and threw him down, etc. The avengers thereby exemplified the same law as the assailants. If I may be permitted to interject my own incidental person, I will finish the story. I approached one of the avengers and attempted to explain dialectically the inconsistency of their behavior, but apparently it was quite impossible for him to engage in anything like that, and he merely repeated: 'He had it coming. Such a scoundrel deserves three against one.' This borders on the comic."

33. Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*, vol. 4: 4360.

34. Alison, *Raising Abel: The Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 74.

35. See Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 95: "Genocide, after all, in an exercise in community building"; Asna Husin, "Islamic Peace Education: Changing Hearts and Minds," in *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*, ed. Qamar-Ul Huda (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010), 152: "voices of moderation, reason, and peaceful resolution of conflict were being silenced by coercive or violent means, including assassination, torture, and extortion"; Tawfik Hamid, *Inside Jihad* (Mountain Lake Park, MD: Mountain Lake Press, 2015), 53: "Once, I gave a sermon at a local mosque, and after prayers a gang of radical Muslims confronted me and my dear friend Dr. Tarek Ragab. They punched him, and as we ran from the mob, they pelted us with stones."

36. I am summarizing, very briefly, my argument in *The Genealogy of Violence: Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); see page 67, for example.

37. For example, James McBride applies Girard's thought to capital punishment, in "Capital Punishment as the Unconstitutional Establishment of Religion: A Girardian Reading of the Death Penalty," *Journal of Church & State* 37, no. 2 (Spring 1995) 263–87; Bernadette Waterman Ward applies Girard's thought to abortion in "Abortion as a Sacrament: Mimetic Desire and Sacrifice in Sexual Politics," *Contagion* 7 (2000):18–35.

38. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 24.

39. Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 206: "The truth is within me, that is, when I am truly within myself (not untruthfully outside myself)."

40. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 4th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

41. Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 110–11.

42. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 277.

43. Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 269–74; *Works of Love*, 121, 278–79; *Christian Discourses*, 84; *The Moment and Late Writings*, 423.

44. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 113–14.

45. Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 175.

46. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 120; *Practice in Christianity*, 197–98; Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination: Judge For Yourself!* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 84.

47. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 400.

48. Charles K. Bellinger, "Toward a Kierkegaardian Understanding of Hitler, Stalin, and the Cold War," in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, ed. George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1992), 218–30.

49. Bellinger, "Toward a Kierkegaardian Understanding," 226–27.

50. Letter from René Girard to Charles Bellinger, May 10, 1993.

51. Letter from René Girard to Charles Bellinger, May 27, 1995.

52. This was published as: Charles Bellinger, "'The Crowd is Untruth': A Comparison of Kierkegaard and Girard," *Contagion* 3 (1996): 103–19.

53. My dissertation was published as Charles Bellinger, *The Genealogy of Violence: Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

54. Letter from René Girard to Charles Bellinger, August 9, 2000.

55. Bellinger, *The Genealogy of Violence*, 88.

56. Girard, *Evolution and Creation*, 150.

57. Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic, 2021).

58. James Alison, *Faith beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 204.

René Girard

Andreas Wilmes

Reflecting on his reputation, Girard said: "People see me too much as one more Christian philosopher."[1] "I'm not a philosopher, and it might be because I'm not a philosopher that I started to read anthropology from the viewpoint of its drama."[2] "Readers do not realize how unphilosophical I am."[3] Further, in a letter to Raymund Schwager dated February 25, 1987, Girard referred with a touch of regret to his "very great philosophical incompetence."[4] Admittedly, during the first years that he spent in the United States, he toyed with the idea of writing essays "in the phenomenological style."[5] He also acknowledged the influence of Sartre (Girard mentioned that *Being and Nothingness* was "the first philosophical book that" he "really understood"[6]) and "the Hegelian climate of the fifties" on *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*.[7] Moreover, he certainly never denied that his mimetic theory has "philosophical implications,"[8] and it is well known that his works often engaged with the history of Western philosophy. Nonetheless, there is no question that Girard considered himself "first and foremost a social scientist."[9] Dumouchel rightly observes that the French anthropologist tended to distinguish philosophy rather firmly from the aim "to make a work of empirical science speaking of the world as it is and as it has been,"[10] and that this very way of defining the relationship between philosophy and science might be debatable. It remains to be seen, however, where this overall attitude of Girard toward philosophy comes from.

It was vital for the core element of the mimetic theory—that is, the hypothesis of a victimage mechanism meant to explain the genesis of

primitive religion—to refer to a real event. From Girard's viewpoint, it would have been absurd to contend that the best explanation of the origins of culture requires the cathartic effects of the founding murder but only taken as a purely abstract logical construct. Despite important commonalities between the "mimetic crisis" and Hobbes's "war of all against all," Girard argued that social contract theories dismiss the possibility that archaic religion may have a genuine social function (i.e., to put an end to the potentially endless cycle of vengeance) and thereby constitute an epistemological obstacle to anthropology.[11] It is the concrete efficiency of the self-regulatory mechanism of collective violence alone that can account for the origination of rituals and myths. The very nature of this theoretical perspective would confront Girard to a peculiar problem; his work failed to fit into the usual categories of academic research. On the one hand, scholars from the social sciences reproached him for holding the non-factually verifiable idea of a founding murder. On the other hand, philosophers took issue with considering the founding murder as a historical reality rather than, for instance, as "a necessary explanatory fiction."[12] Girard, of course, had no way to make concessions to either side. With the benefit of hindsight, he felt that he had been considered *too philosophical by social scientists* (i.e., too concerned with abstract concepts rather than observable facts) and *too unphilosophical by philosophers* (i.e., not concerned enough with the logic inherent in abstract concepts).[13] Against this background, his numerous interviews show at times changes in attitude that are hardly surprising. He could sometimes declare that social scientists were meant to be his privileged interlocutors, yet other times that his "natural audience is philosophers."[14]

Post-modernism Does Not Manage to Talk about Violence

Certainly, Girard was unsympathetic to deconstructionism (to say the least) and often insisted on its sheer philosophical incompatibility with his mimetic theory. While deconstructionists held that "everything is about language; everything is play, futility," he was concerned with the "real human relations" behind primitive religion.[15] Obviously, in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* and later on in *The Scapegoat*,[16] the parallel between his interpretation of myths and the commonly agreed

interpretations of texts of persecution was both meant to show that the hypothesis of a real victimage mechanism was not scientifically unsound *and* to push deconstructionists out of their linguistic comfort zone. In this respect, the question he aimed to put to some of his contemporary philosophical critics could not be more straightforward: Rather than stubbornly holding to the dogma that "words can only refer to other words," shouldn't we agree that witch trial documents are based on false accusations and that there are real victims behind them? And, if so, is it really that counter-intuitive to offer a hypothesis arguing that myths might bear the trace of a violent and very real event?

The question of the relation between language and violence has been critical in Girard's disagreements with the philosophical avant-gardes of its time. On the one hand, as he recalled in his conversations with Steven E. Berry, "Deconstructionists tended to make fun of my concern with violence and with history."[17] On the other hand, the rise of post- or anti-Hegelianism in France led to influential and radical positions that identified violence with a negation or difference resisting the sublation [*Aufhebung*] of dialectics, in other words, that identified violence with the ineffable. In *Erotism*, Georges Bataille stated that "violence bears within itself this disheveled denial [*negation* échevelée], putting an end to any possibility of speech."[18] In the same vein, in his introduction to Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, Deleuze wrote that "in principle, violence is something that does not speak."[19] In the 1970s, Alfred Simon contended in his review of *Violence and the Sacred* that, unlike Blanchot and Artaud, Girard failed to understand that "aiming to speak about violence amounts to aiming to speak the unspeakable."[20] In sum, there would either be nothing beyond language, or violence would go well beyond the limits of language. Either way, the reality of violence, with respect to language, would be completely out of reach. Hence, Girard argued that "Post-modernism does not manage to talk about violence: it puts it between parentheses and simply ignores its origin. And with it ignores the most important truth: that reality is somewhere accessible."[21] This criticism of the defeatist position of speech in the face of the reality of violence is perhaps what best summarizes Girard's disagreements with the philosophical ideas en vogue at his time. Indeed, what set him apart from many of his contemporaries was his conviction that it is actually possible to "talk about violence." In *Violence and the Sacred*,

he acknowledged “a certain confidence in language” in contrast “to some modern thinkers who . . . declare that language is incapable of expressing truth.”[22] It is not necessary to go beyond the limits of language to show that the violence of the persecutors can be the key to understanding the structure of a text. Within any given community, violence is subject to spread like a contagious disease thereby fueling mimetic rivalries that render individuals more and more alike. Violence is liable to undo the hierarchies, categories, and distinctions that provided stability to human relations within the community. Violence, in other words, is prone to lead to undifferentiation. Now, given that the very existence of language entails differential gaps (between signs and between the sign and what it designates), we might be inclined to surmise that undifferentiation is that of which we cannot speak. Nonetheless, according to Girard, this is only true if we downplay the range of possibilities offered by our language. Greek tragedy, for instance, often shows that “it is impossible either to affirm or to deny anything about one of the two” rivals “without having to affirm or deny it about the other.”[23] Increasing undifferentiation amounts to ever more symmetry between individuals, which can be pictured by the relations between the characters within the theater play. Like Shakespeare putting into words the “crisis of degree,” great writers have developed literary techniques around the theme of undifferentiation that Girard studied in great detail. Last but not least, we should not forget that “language is [also] metaphorical; it uses certain objects to mean something else.”[24] On Girard’s account, archaic myths tend to attribute “crimes of undifferentiation” to the surrogate victim and may also refer to undifferentiation through the idea of original chaos. What is more, “in most cultures of the world, in Greek culture, twins are a symbol of fighting doubles,”[25] that is to say, of undifferentiation triggered by mimetic rivalry.

Philosophy and the Extraordinary Textuality of the Holy Scriptures

But the strengths of language, its ability to talk about violence, unquestionably reach their peak in the Bible, which, according to Girard, “breaks away from the rules of ordinary textuality.”[26] Archaic myths are stories of persecution told from the point of view of the persecutors. They are shaped through the delusional state of the crowd, the cathartic effects of

collective violence, and, ultimately, the miscognition of the innocence of the surrogate victim. In other words, myths give rise to texts that are unaware of their proper structure. To decipher these texts, one has to part with the perspective they introduce. It is their blind spot that points to the rules of their interpretation. In contrast, by revealing the founding murder, the Holy Scriptures display their "own exegetical functioning."[27] In archaic myths, the rules of interpretation are to be found outside of the text. In the Bible, the rules of interpretation are immanent to the text. Or, otherwise put, the text shows itself to be aware of its very own structure.

Now, to Girard, there is no philosophy that can compete with this extraordinary textuality of the Holy Scriptures. His position is diametrically opposed to that of Hegel, according to whom philosophy would prove its superiority over the Christian religion by translating into rigorous concepts what the latter expressed only through symbols and feelings.[28] On the contrary, "there is a convergence of the truth of Christian Revelation and of Science, a common truth" that no philosophy can replace or supersede.[29] The boundaries brought to light by religion and anthropology are also those of the history of Western philosophy. On the one hand, there is the sacralized violence of archaic religion. On the other hand, there is a radically different kind of sacredness, based on the renunciation of violence and on love, brought forth by Christianity. Philosophy may either tend toward the former or the latter kind of absolute; *there is no third way*.

Presumably, to Girard, Nietzsche's famous remarks about "Dionysus versus the 'Crucified'" pointed to a universal truth about the history of Western philosophy.[30] According to him, Nietzsche was to blame for having knowingly endorsed the false (i.e., Dionysian) narrative of mythology about the victimage mechanism.[31] Nevertheless, Girard also praised the German philosopher for having accurately identified the difference of meaning between the sacrifice of Dionysus—involving the sacralization of the blind violence of the crowd—and that of Christ, which unveils the violence of the crowd and the innocence of the surrogate victim. This difference of meaning between the martyrdom of Dionysus and Christ is also the difference between the only two forms of the absolute that can exist within the history of Western philosophy—which does not mean, of course, that we should reduce the history of philosophy to the search for the archaic or Christian sacred.

The Christian Logos and the Logos of Heraclitus

Did Girard regard his appeal to realism, dismissal of postmodernism, and apology for Christianity as a return to more traditional forms of Western philosophical thought? This question, as we shall see, is more difficult than it appears at first sight. For instance, his often-quoted statement "Three quarters of what I say is in Saint Augustine" must be taken with a grain of salt,[32] for he also pointed out that that assertion should be taken as a "witticism" or "quip [*boutade*]" with nonetheless some truth to it.[33] To be sure, Girard's anthropology and reading of the Gospels remains faithful to the doctrine of original sin. Like Augustine, he believed that negative human desire is consequent from a broken relationship with God (a broken relationship that he notably represented through the opposition between deviated and vertical transcendency).[34] He also considered Augustine's observations on the baby becoming jealous at the sight of his brother fed by the mother's breast milk as a powerful yet somewhat "mythical" example of mimetic desire. The example is powerful in that it shows that mimetic desire and rivalries are "there from the origin."[35] It is, however, mythical in that babies do not have the ability to identify breast milk as a potentially non-shareable object. The founding father of mimetic theory further admired Augustine's insights on the Passion of Christ and the violent origins of culture in *The City of God* but nonetheless saw them as "incomplete."[36] Despite striking commonalities between Girard and Augustine, the question of the extent to which the French anthropologist may be considered as a neo-Augustinian thinker remains quite open to debate.

More generally, Girard's correspondence reveals that, while he was mostly focused on analyzing the Holy Scriptures from an anthropological perspective, it was left to his friend and colleague Raymund Schwager to address the great theological questions raised by the mimetic theory. That latter endeavor was by no means secondary. Following Feuerbach's footsteps, Kojève contended one may reach a true and definitive anthropological knowledge only by removing any transcendent dimension from the New Testament. In other words, truth, in its anthropological sense, would be nothing else than *Christianity minus God*.[37] In contrast, according to Girard, Christian Revelation is the condition of possibility of a real science of man. He firmly believed that "the authentic knowledge about

violence and all its works to be found in the Gospels cannot be the result of human action alone."[38] Only a divine power was able to break away with the "closure of representation" of the self-regulatory mechanisms of violence and to show what was standing behind them since the foundation of the world. It is therefore not a question of replacing Christian theology with Christian anthropology, nor of demonstrating the pre-eminence of the latter over the former. The hypothesis of a victimage mechanism may be considered as "an exclusively scientific one [*proprement et seulement scientifique*]"[39]—that is, regardless of matters of faith. Nonetheless, any effort to trace the very conditions of possibility of that hypothesis cannot ultimately go around the question of God and His relationship with man.

It follows that there should be, at least a priori, an undeniable complementarity between anthropology and Christian philosophy. However, Girard also contended that the "absolute singularity" of the Christian Logos has been obscured under the ongoing influence of ancient Greek philosophy. The history of Christian thought is highly complex because it involves theologians aiming to grasp and warrant the uniqueness of the Gospels within a philosophical framework, which is not entirely appropriate to that task. Girard concurred with Heidegger in distinguishing the Logos of Heraclitus from the Christian Logos, although he understood that distinction in a quite different way.[40] Whereas the Logos of Heraclitus (which corresponds to the Logos of ancient Greek philosophy and, more generally, to that of culture) "holds opposites together, and not without violence," the Christian Logos "only attracts humans towards good reciprocity by destroying little by little all the myths of violence, by gradually depriving the other Logos of all sacrificial prospects, of everything that allows us to disguise it; and, by a counterstroke, it abolishes any limit to our own violence."[41] Both medieval and modern philosophy, Girard argued, did not take enough notice of the incommensurability between these two forms of Logos. Hence, the history of Western philosophy inevitably came to a kind of "mimetic rivalry": "To sum up: Christian thinkers regard Greek philosophers as unconscious theologians. For post-Christians, on the other hand, the very idea of a specifically Christian Logos is taken to be a shameless fabrication disguising a clumsy attempt to imitate philosophy."[42]

Girard thus saw himself as doubly at odds with the traditional boundaries of Western philosophy. He was critical of the expulsion of the Christian Logos from the rise of modern rationalism until the present. But he also disagreed with the assumption that the Christian Logos would simply represent a logical continuity and completion to that of the ancient Greeks. In any case, although Girard's anthropology surely allows for a certain kind of Christian philosophy, it nonetheless does not entail a mere return to Christian philosophy in its most traditional forms.

Philosophy and the Undecidability of Mimesis

As a matter of fact, Girard thought that even traditional philosophy—which, like for instance Thomism, is looking for the logical foundations of knowledge and has to "work with neatly distinguished categories"—was somewhat incompatible with his hypothesis of a victimage mechanism, which not only makes room for some contingency but also gives rise to seemingly contradictory results.[43] As he put it: "What turns many philosophers away from my theory is indeed this very point: that the creation of culture is engendered by religion through the victimary mechanism, which is in fact contingent and mechanistic."[44] It is worth remembering that the mechanism Girard aimed at uncovering is by no means a "deterministic fact." The idea of the random selection of a surrogate victim is not the mere result of a logical deduction from the group dynamics of mimetic desire; it is required as an inference to the best explanation. A mimetic crisis may lead either to the self-destruction of the group or to its survival through the polarization of its violence on a scapegoat. In strictly logical terms, the latter option may even be seen as less convincing than the former, which does not need any further presupposition beyond the dynamics of undifferentiation. If, however, we are to explain the genesis of rituals and myths, then the latter option, that is, the idea of a self-regulatory mechanism of violence, is clearly more relevant than the former. One must therefore be careful not to conflate Girard's major hypothesis with a strict—as it were, abstract—logical necessity. The hypothesis of the founding murder allows for a contingent dimension but is at the same time consistent with abductive reasoning. It should not be taken

as a logical a priori model of the unfolding of the mimetic crisis. Quite the opposite:

> We can hypothetically assume that several prehistoric groups did not survive precisely because they didn't find a way to cope with the mimetic crisis; their mimetic rivalries didn't find a victim who polarized their rage, saving them from self-destruction. We could even conceive of groups that solved one or two crises through the founding murder but failed to re-enact it ritually, developing a durable religious system, and therefore succumbing to the next crisis. What I have said is that the threshold of culture is related to the scapegoat mechanism, and that the first known institutions are closely related to its deliberate and planned re-enactment.[45]

Although philosophers have been interested in the problematic dimensions of mimesis (and certainly to a much greater extent than Girard acknowledged,)[46] their reflections would nonetheless tend to underappreciate its original and radical undecidability. How is it that the disheveled mimesis of undifferentiation can give birth to something rather than nothing? How does one go from undifferentiation to differentiation? This was the key question to Girard. And this question, as he believed, would only strike us as inescapable if we do not take the categories inherited from our culture for granted. In contrast, Western philosophical thought, according to Girard, did not find its starting point in the anthropological problem of the undecidability of mimesis. Philosophers may break imitation into various kinds, analyze its logical implications, and even its anthropological significance (e.g., Aristotle's famous statement that "human beings . . . differ from the rest of the animals in that they are the most imitative and do their first learning through imitation.")[47] However, to a greater or lesser extent, even the most outstanding philosophers of the Western tradition would remain dependent and focused on imitation as a culturally stabilized reality. The move from undifferentiation to differentiation, which Girard explained through the contingent and mechanistic fact of the founding murder, would be at once the blind spot and the condition of possibility of the Western philosophical tradition: "If mimesis is undecidable and worse than undecidable, there must be a mechanism of self-regulation somewhere and it must be mimetic, too. Through that mechanism, cultural forms can appear and stabilize to such an extent that philosophers can make mimesis safe for philosophy."[48]

Mythology, Philosophy, and Supplemental Logic

In addition to being both "contingent and mechanistic," the victimage mechanism "triggers opposite effects." By reaching its climax, the disorder of undifferentiation eventually generates order. The surrogate victim is then regarded by the group as at once responsible for the mimetic crisis and vital in its resolution. Hence the ambivalent feelings toward the transcendence generated by the violent death of the victim: gods are at once threatening and benevolent. Hence also the "two opposing aspects" of the "sacrificial act," which is at the same time "a sacred obligation to be neglected at grave peril" and "a sort of criminal activity entailing perils of equal gravity,"[49] that is at the same time the cure (re-differentiation through the cathartic effects of violence ensuring the very balance and survival of the group) and the poison (undifferentiation threatening the very balance and survival of that same group).

These opposite effects are further reflected through myths which perpetuate the miscognition (*méconnaissance*) of the victimage mechanism. This point is critical for understanding Girard's main contention against Western metaphysics. What makes myths similar is their "consistent inconsistencies";[50] they inevitably feature an uncanny "logic," which is of prime interest to anthropology but might be unsettling to traditional forms of philosophical thought. First, myths represent a given community, which is always already there or, otherwise put, whose origin is taken as pure, self-evident, and self-sufficient. Second, they introduce an intruder, who, at first glance, merely appears as "added and superimposed from outside."[51] The intruder is merely regarded as secondary to the pure origins of the community, but it soon comes to light that he or she is aiming to "pervert, undermine and supplant" it. This leaves the community with no other choice than to vindicate that the intruder must be "avoided, rejected, discarded, expelled." Third, however, that very discrimination turns out to be critical in order to preserve and define the essence of the community. In other words, it transpires that the expelled intruder, initially regarded as secondary and purely extraneous, proves "indispensable" to compensate for the "deficiencies" and lack of "effectiveness" of "the primary origins."[52] And yet, and finally, rather than recognizing that conclusion, archaic religion conforms to "the illogical twists and turns" of myths. Although the expelled intruder ultimately makes the mythical tale possible and "governs"

it, that very fact is not acknowledged and "partakes of the unconscious attitude" of mankind toward myths.[53]

The four features just outlined form a pattern, which, in Girard's view, constituted an outstanding clue appealing to "the hypothesis of the violent mob as the generative engine behind mythology."[54] They further correspond to a pattern, which Derrida uncovered in the great texts of the Western philosophical tradition (Plato, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Husserl to name just a few) and referred to as the "*logique du supplément*" (supplemental logic). In "Plato's Pharmacy,"[55] for instance, Derrida shows that the main thesis of the *Phaedrus* according to which writing would be a merely secondary addition to the spoken word—taken as the natural locus of the dialectic unfolding of truth, that is, of the *logos*—is untenable. At first glance, it may just seem that writing is a derivative of the authentic knowledge and memory (*anamnesis*, that is, "live memory" understood as the recollection of innate knowledge) found in the spoken word. However, the exteriorization of memory through writing might potentially tend to supplant *anamnesis* by substituting it with purely mechanical methods of memorization—e.g., mnemonics, learning something by heart, copying down a text, that is, the techniques related to *hypomnesis*. Not only would live memory be perverted and undermined, but authentic knowledge would also risk being replaced with the illusion of knowledge (inasmuch as, for instance, to copy down or recite a text does not imply comprehending the reasoning or truth in it). In other words, the hollow repetition of the simulacra of writing turns out to be a substantial threat to Plato's contention of the pre-eminence of the spoken word. Writing, with its lifeless artifacts, endangers his very conception of *logos*. And yet, it further emerges that *hypomnesis* is an indispensable *supplement* to the deficiencies and lack of effectiveness of *anamnesis* ("living memory is finite, it already has holes in it before writing ever comes to leave its traces.")[56] In an analogous way to that of the surrogate victim, the supplement of writing is at once what is expelled and what commands the system. And, still in an analogous way, even though it is crucial for his thought, this supplemental logic is not acknowledged by Plato as being part of the principles around which his philosophical system is organized.

Part of these analogies are acknowledged by Derrida, since he "centers his analysis on a family of words that he himself presents as formidably significant, the family of the word *pharmakos* which is the ritual human

victim of the Greeks" and thereby minutely "shows that the word *pharmakon* is used in such a way [by Plato] as to arbitrarily favor Socrates at the expense of the Sophists in his polemical battles with them."[57] On the one hand, Plato aims at getting rid of the ambivalent meaning of the *pharmakon* by attributing its positive meaning (remedy) to Socrates and its negative meaning (poison) to the sophists. On the other hand, he unwittingly vindicates a supplemental (*pharmakon*-like) logic that is no less arbitrary than that of the Sophists. Indeed, Derrida shows that the difference between Plato and Sophists like Gorgias lies in that the former takes writing as a supplement while the latter identify the supplement with the spoken word. In other words, the philosophical dispute would ultimately boil down to a "*pharmakon* against *pharmakon*" issue.[58]

Philosophy Is the Continuation of Myth by More Sophisticated Means

To Girard, those specific uses of the word *pharmakon* showed "an extraordinary link between philosophical polemics and the mob effect of mythology and ritual."[59] At this point, it is appropriate to dwell on a sometimes-neglected aspect of Derrida's actual influence on his thought. It is well known that *Violence and the Sacred* pays homage to "Plato's Pharmacy." However, it is less frequently acknowledged that Girard saw in Derrida's analyses of supplemental logic a major insight that significantly helped him to define his overall attitude toward Western metaphysics. Already in his 1972 masterpiece, Girard uses the analyses carried out in "Plato's Pharmacy" as a means to illustrate his much broader contention according to which "philosophy, like tragedy, can at certain levels serve as an attempt at expulsion, an attempt perpetually renewed because never wholly successful."[60] Later on, in a letter to Schwager, dated January 2, 1987, he acknowledged even more clearly his debt to Derrida:

> Lately, I have been rereading philosophy and French criticism, in particular Derrida, but also on the side a little Heidegger, and I am struck, with Derrida in particular, by his powerful analysis of textual mechanisms, which are actually sacrificial mechanisms.
>
> I would like to do something on this, but I am not yet really ready.
>
> I would like to demonstrate that philosophy is a direct extension of the structures of the sacred, and that its defense of the absolute (being, nature, the subject, man), can never guard itself from the internal disintegration of its own concepts [*la désagrégation interne de ses propres concepts*], except by the exclusion of all that threatens these systems from within.

> With Derrida, there is always an effort to show that the philosophy of being, and then the philosophy of the subject, beginning with Descartes, is tied to a valorization of the living *word*, or fullness of *speech*, as opposed to *writing*; and *writing* is the obligation to pass through the *substitution* of a sign, a sort of scapegoat victim that we always strive to expel, but that we can't do without, in the same way we can't do without *ritual*.
>
> And all this is bound to a ritual economy and logic, which, in the final analysis, is that of the sacred that he [Derrida] discovers in the texts *behind* the official allegiance of the philosopher or the writer; with this, he critiques the traditional logic of identity and the excluded middle [*du tiers exclu*]."[61]

The key idea of this letter is that "philosophy is a direct extension of the structures of the sacred." Otherwise put, as Girard would claim in an interview given in 1993, "*philosophy is the continuation of myth by more sophisticated* [i.e., conceptual] *means*."[62] These are quite bold statements, which should not be misinterpreted. Obviously, Girard neither meant to say that philosophical texts should be deciphered in exactly the same way as myths, nor that philosophy would prove unable to advance human knowledge through concepts and methods of its own.

He nonetheless surely meant that supplemental logic first appears in myths but is still at work—by means of "sacrificial displacements"—in more subtle and less easily recognizable forms, in the history of Western philosophy, and that despite the efforts of philosophers to rid themselves or distance themselves from religious thought. That idea is consistent with his interpretations of ancient Greek philosophy especially carried out in *Violence and the Sacred*. Pre-Socratic philosophers are shown to inquire very directly into the supplemental logic of mythology. One finds "a clear summation . . . of the role of violence in the engendering of the gods and of distinctions"[63] in Heraclitus's famous fragment "War is father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free."[64] Girard further discovered in the writings of Empedocles remarkable insights into the questions of "sacrificial crisis" and "monstrous doubles."[65] Later, in Plato, as we saw, supplemental logic intervenes in the much more theoretical question of the pre-eminence of speech over writing. In contrast to Aristotle, Plato remained "closer in time and spirit to the" atmosphere of the "sacrificial crisis" (from the civil war in Corcyra to the civil war of the Thirty Tyrants, he lived in chaotic and tense times).[66] This is why, to Girard, we still find an "ambivalent view of imitation" in Plato's work.[67] The Greek philosopher's concerns about the dangers posed by the simulacra of writing and poetry show that the

existential threat of bad reciprocity (always likely to pave the way to undifferentiation and the destruction of social order) still influenced his thought.[68] Aristotle was further away from the context of crisis and therefore quite naturally upheld a positive "definition of imitation which literally more or less excludes violence."[69] His philosophical concerns are rather remote from the problem of undifferentiation and, more generally, of the preservation of the social order by religion. And yet the supplemental logic of myth still permeates, for instance, his aesthetics. The notion of *katharsis* in Aristotle's *Poetics* is much less violent and may therefore be seen at first glance as bearing very little resemblance to its initial meaning (of which he might have been unaware) that "referred primarily to the mysterious benefits that accrue to the community upon the death of a human *katharma* or *pharmakos*."[70] But in the final analysis, the philosopher assumes a "tragic flaw" on part of the hero and thereby fails to acknowledge his innocence.[71] Ultimately, he bestows to the fate of the tragic hero a function akin to that of the sacrificial victim, who is expelled yet indispensable to compensate for the deficiencies of the community. Through his use of the notion of *katharsis*, Aristotle would have unwittingly revealed that "tragic theater is nothing but sacrifice reenacted as drama,"[72] or, otherwise put, that "tragedy springs from mythic and ritual forms."[73] Through gentler means, tragedy continues the function of sacrifice, which is to contain violence through violence. Even though the philosopher never plainly states what kind of emotions are purged through *katharsis*, it is nonetheless clear on closer consideration that

> the spectator may shudder with "pity and fear," but he must also feel a deep sense of gratitude for his own orderly and relatively secure existence. Every true work of art might be said to partake of the initiatory process in that it forces itself upon the emotions, offers intimations of violence, and instills a respect for the power of violence; that is, it promotes prudence and discourages hubris.[74]

From mythology to the dawn of the Western philosophical tradition, supplemental logic gradually devolves into more abstract and sophisticated textual mechanisms. It thereby emerges that philosophers would tend to misrecognize the actual principles or defining element around which their texts are built. This misrecognition would moreover show that, overall, philosophy would not be entirely capable of getting rid of the mechanisms of expulsion concealed by mythology. The Western philosophical tradition

would rest on a displacement rather than on a suppression of supplemental logic. It would thus rest on a rearrangement rather than on a rejection of the original expulsion that made mythology possible in the first place. In other words, as Girard argued, "What philosophy does by expelling myth is to discard an outmoded vehicle of scapegoating and to reinstate the same process in less violent forms which are invisible once again."[75]

Novelistic Truth and Philosophical Polemics

Great novelists ranked higher in Girard's esteem than philosophers, but why did he favor the former? As shown in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, great novels are ultimately about conversion. The outstanding novelist gradually comes to comprehend that his romantic illusions were feeding on his own attachment to pride, which was nothing more than a denial of the actual similarity between himself and the other. His renunciation of pride turns out to be a long and painful process confronting him with his feelings of incompleteness or, better still, the realization of his own "lack of being." But the death of pride also paves the way to his rebirth. To Girard, great novels did not correspond to systems of thought but to a thought in motion, to a development of thought whereby the writer frees himself from the lies of romanticism and opens himself to the other as well as to a more authentic (i.e., vertical rather than deviated) form of transcendence. Thought does away with metaphysical desire to open itself to a higher truth. The individual de-centers from himself by acknowledging the illusion of difference that separated him from others and by gaining the necessary awareness to turn toward positive models of desire. Outstanding novels are about that very process beyond which they do not set forth to vindicate a *Weltanschauung* that would be set in stone.

In contrast, the effort to systematize thought is, to a great extent, the defining element of the Western philosophical tradition. Whereas great novels mostly introduce a process of thought by which the individual de-centers from himself, philosophical texts would have a stronger tendency and ambition to be their own "center of gravity." In what is perhaps the most important text regarding his general stance on philosophy ("Origins: A View from the Literature," published in 1992), Girard drew a distinction between thought expressed as a "process" and as a "static structure." The

latter form of expression, he argued, would be more liable to the supplemental logic of mimetic rivalry:

> The structure of human thought when it cannot express itself as process and tries to do it as static structure, will always be supplementary because its polemical dynamism will always feed on what it rejects; it will always be obsessed with the other against which it reacts and which it imitates. Non-mythical forms do not surrender to this other as completely as in the case of myth but nevertheless turn it into some kind of foundation scapegoat, too, an antagonist that they cannot do without and that becomes an essential part of the structure in the foundation of which they are buried, and whose presence will reassert itself when it is least expected. They are the mediators of internal mediation. They always play a fundamental role in our own thinking. The dual meaning of the word "discrimination" in English reminds us of this fundamental role that violent exclusion plays in the very process of human thinking.[76]

Girard was not evoking a point of view that he believed to be proven but rather a hypothesis he saw as worth exploring. He was further advocating for what he saw as a healthy suspicion toward any kind of thought system (incidentally, we shall note that he has always refused the idea of a "*système Girard*"). His conviction was that philosophers' efforts to systematize thought, whatever their merits, cannot be entirely separated from their actual "polemical background." As a result, even the greatest texts from the Western philosophical tradition would reflect "a hesitation between two centers,"[77] that is, between the core elements acknowledged by the author and the rival theory that may supplant his system.

Girard thus came to closely relate supplemental logic to the issue of the model-obstacle of desire. Let us dwell on this. In the context of internal mediation, the disciple, by getting closer to his model or mediator, unwittingly suggests to the model that he redirect his desire toward the object. It is then through unconscious imitation that the model blocks the disciple's way to the object. From this point on, the mediator turns into a model-obstacle and makes the disciple's desire for the object ever more vivid. By persisting in his will to acquire the object, the disciple will become in turn a model-obstacle for his mediator. Hence, agents are becoming a model-obstacle for each other, and they gradually lose sight of the initial object of their rivalry. From now on, each wants "to be what the other becomes when he possesses this or that object."[78] The disciple's desire for the model constantly escalates with the model's resistance. As the disciple's desire to become like their model grows, their frustration grows too. The more they feel rejected by the model-obstacle, the more they

admire it. Eventually, powerful feelings of admiration and hatred alternate in the disciple, binding them more and more strongly to their model. That ambivalent attitude indeed corresponds to the supplemental logic uncovered by Derrida. On the one hand, the model-obstacle is regarded as a mere impediment which purports to supplant the disciple but would not threaten his very autonomy from within. On the other hand, the imitation of the model-obstacle partakes the disciple's unconscious and thereby shows to be the defining element of his desire. The model-obstacle first appears as a secondary and purely extraneous element but then, on closer inspection, shows to be an indispensable compensation for the deficiencies (or "lack of being") of the disciple's supposed autonomy. In the engendering of myths, the model-obstacle is nothing else than the surrogate victim who is violently expelled by the community. In philosophical texts, the model-obstacle would be the opponent within intellectual polemics whose actual influence is never fully acknowledged. From mythology to philosophy, the degree of intensity and violence of the relationship to the model-obstacle decreases but still translates into a mostly unconscious "textual mechanism." Hence Girard's hypothesis that, from the perspective of supplemental logic, the "polemics of philosophy are continuous, perhaps, with the violence of mythology."[79]

Throughout his writings, he explored that hypothesis in several ways. In "Origins: A View from the Literature," he pointed out that the supplemental logic of the model-obstacle can be seen at work in the relations of American intellectuals toward Marxism and Russian intellectuals toward the ideology of the free market during the Cold War in which both sides were "strongly influenced by what they reject[ed]."[80] The way Girard analyzed (by following here in Derrida's footsteps) Plato's polemics with the Sophists, the polemics between Christian and post-Christian philosophy, or Nietzsche's polemics with Wagner, further shows his commitment to his hypothesis on the continuity between philosophy and the violence of mythology.

From Cartesianism to the Cult of Model-Obstacles

But we may also argue that this general stance toward the Western philosophical tradition was already germinating in *Deceit, Desire, and the*

Novel and *Resurrection from the Underground*. In Girard's theory of "triangular desire," the relation to the other becomes paradigmatic and may even challenge the idea of the birth of consciousness within an isolated and strictly individual mind. Hervé van Baren rightly noticed that, although Girard never expounded a straightforward critique of the cogito, he nonetheless dismissed Descartes's main assumptions starting with his very first book.[81] We may further notice that *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* and *Resurrection from the Underground* sketched out an account of the vulnerability of Western philosophy to the supplemental logic of the model-obstacle from Descartes up to the twentieth century.

Girard acknowledged that Descartes's radical doubt and cogito laid the foundations of modern philosophy by showing that what is certain and rational can only be grounded on our "subjective experience." However, the gradual triumph of Cartesianism will raise multiple issues. To be sure, the rise of rationalism frees humanity from the superstitions and beliefs that were supposed to explain the world they inhabit. But the other side of the coin is that Man, whose only guide henceforth is his "subjective experience," will have increasing trouble orienting himself in a more and more rationalized and complex world. Given that the extent of what he can know for certain and by himself is inevitably limited, he will have to seek further guidance through the authority of experts—who can more or less guarantee that they have personally and thoroughly inquired into the issue or matter at stake. On the level of humanity's attitude to knowledge, the position of the Cartesian self thus reinforces that of the Girardian "disciple," who can only orient himself or herself in the world by borrowing his or her desires from others. In other words, Cartesianism paves the way to a modern "cult of experts," which very likely leads to a general and unconscious cult of models-obstacles of desire.[82] This will become more and more evident starting from the age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, which put an end to the era of *external mediation* in which mankind's spiritual and intellectual life was mainly based on the imitation of transcendent and culturally stable models. This era now gives way to that of *internal mediation*, "in which, at least in principle, individuals and communities are free to adopt whichever models they prefer and, better still, no model at all."[83] On the one hand, over the next centuries, innovation will gradually become an end in itself and a notion that radically excludes imitation. On the other hand, advances in social equality, free

economic competition, and technology will reduce the distances separating individuals and thereby nurture rivalrous imitation. While models of desire multiply, imitation is getting more and more denied and concealed. Regarding Western philosophy, we may for instance notice that the underground psychology of rivalrous imitation will become the blind spot of the modern ethics of "enlightened self-interest." Indeed, humankind's obsession with models-turned-obstacles is diametrically opposed to the idea that holds that advancing the interests of the group and serving one's own interests go hand in hand. This is well illustrated by Dostoevsky's novel *Notes from Underground*,[84] in which the narrator is at the same time fascinated with those who reject him (the officer and his former colleagues during the school reunion) and repelled by those who are attracted to him (Liza, the kind prostitute). Due to his morbid obsession with obstacles, the narrator of the *Notes* is stuck at a stage where his interests, as well as those of others, are mutually negated. In the end, Dostoevsky's novel offers a radical critique of Adam Smith's "invisible hand" as well as of Bentham's and Mill's utilitarianism, and the economic theories of laissez-faire. In Girard's reading of the *Notes*, it is the unacknowledged phenomenon of the fascination with model-obstacles that shows why the idea of a spontaneous harmonization between rational and egotistic individuals is nothing but wishful thinking.

If the era of internal mediation comes gradually to reject the culturally stable and transcendent models of the past, the question of the Cartesian self will also change radically. In Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy, cogito ergo sum* is the starting point of philosophy, but it is also meant to be inseparable from God as the cause of my existence.[85] However, once philosophy has got rid of the idea of God, the ever more pressing issue will be to determine how the Cartesian self can become, ontologically speaking, its own measure and foundation. Gradually, the solipsistic self will aim to found itself through self-affirmation: it will strive to claim, like God in the Old Testament, that "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14, NSAB).[86] Girard contended that this tendency would become particularly conspicuous with the onset of post-Kantian philosophy:

> In the course of its history Western individualism took over little by little the prerogatives that had belonged to God in medieval philosophy. This is not a matter of a simple philosophical mode, a passing infatuation for the subjective. Since Descartes, there is no longer any point of departure except the *cogito ergo sum*. Kant succeeded for a time in

> keeping the Watergates [*sic*] of subjectivism closed; he managed this with a completely arbitrary compromise, but the truth must out and it does so with a bang. Absolute idealism and Promethean thought will push Cartesianism to its extreme consequences.[87]

Around the nineteenth century, "deviated transcendency" obviously started to deeply permeate Western philosophy. In France, Auguste Comte would aim to replace traditional religion with his positivist "religion of humanity." In Germany, Nietzsche would introduce the Übermensch as a way of overcoming the "death of God" and Christian "slave morality." Meanwhile, Left Hegelians, such as Ludwig Feuerbach, would contend that God is nothing more than a human projection. Humanity was supposed to overcome its alienation through religion by reclaiming its own attributes mistakenly granted to God. To Girard, an ontological deficiency, or "lack of being," is integral to mankind. The disciple is always in search of a "fullness of being" of which he or she is deprived. "Metaphysical desire" is the ultimate end of triangular desire. It is a desire for the model's only seemingly self-sufficient being. It rests on an adulteration of humanity's desire for God, or on "deviated transcendency" (as opposed to authentic "vertical transcendency"). Our longing for transcendence does not vanish with the dawning of the era of internal mediation. On the contrary, our inescapable need for it begins by seeking "satisfaction in the human world."[88] Traditional belief in God recedes, as human beings gradually become "Gods in the eyes of each other."[89] Their desire for transcendence cannot be suppressed. As they turn away from the vertical transcendence of God and religious tradition, it becomes harder for them to renounce their pride. Metaphysical desire gives them the illusion that self-sufficiency is within their reach.

The more the claims of individualism and humanism are on the rise, the more philosophical thought becomes dependent on the supplemental logic of the model-obstacle. This is the dynamic that Girard saw at work from Descartes to his time and whose final outcome is very bleak. At first, my model-obstacle is nothing other than the one who blocks my way to the object. But it soon turns out that the value of objects to me strictly depends on the model-obstacle's prestige. It follows that, where there is something worth being desired, there must be a model-obstacle. The conclusion then comes down to the following idea: the stronger the model-obstacle, the better. However, given that the model-obstacle's strength amounts to their

capacity to block the disciple's way to them, we are led even to a far more radical conclusion: namely, that *what is the worthiest of being desired is whatever negates me the most*. Even stronger model-obstacles than people who reject, despise, or ignore us are obstacles deprived of human consciousness. In a nutshell, *the ultimate obstacle is death*.

As shown by Kirilov's suicide in *Demons*, the human desire for self-divinization goes hand in hand with the desire for death. "The affirmation of the self ends in the negation of the self. The will to make oneself God is a will to self-destruction which is gradually realized."[90] This truth brought to light by the great novelist Dostoevsky will gradually, and in an analogous way to Freud's return of the repressed, manifest itself in the history of Western philosophy. Girard pointed out that, from Hegel to Kojève and then Sartre, the growing interest in the concept of "the negative" is a key symptom of that trend. While the supplemental logic of the model-turned-obstacle becomes more and more inescapable, Western philosophers would still aim at conjuring it away by turning it into the main feature of man's freedom. It is when the behind-the-scenes of supplemental logic is about to be revealed that it is the most vividly denied. "The *Negative* which so many modern philosophers identify with freedom and life is in reality the herald of slavery and death."[91] Hence the history of desire, which Girard tried to bring to light in his study of the great novelists, also encompassed in his eyes the history of philosophy from Descartes till the twentieth century.

Conclusion

Whether one agrees or not with Girard, his overall attitude toward the Western philosophical tradition should be clearer now. In wanting to show "that philosophy is a direct extension of the structures of the sacred," he mostly sketched out an immense task, which he never felt able to complete and of which he only explored some avenues of research. Do his main hypotheses, outlined above, allow for a convincing reading of the history of Western philosophy? This question goes beyond the scope of this chapter and should be left to the readers. In any case, it is certain that any attempt to answer this question cannot avoid a confrontation of the great texts of Western philosophy with Girard's mimetic theory.

Although Girard was interested in the great anthropological intuitions of some philosophers, he mainly distinguished himself as a critic of philosophical texts. His main concern was to bring the abstract concepts of philosophical discourse back to the reality of human violence and conflicts. Throughout his writings, he mostly characterized philosophy in a negative way, that is, according to its anthropological and religious boundaries. It is no exaggeration to state that the question as to whether philosophy differs from other branches of knowledge by dealing with its very own issues, tasks, and methods was of lesser concern to him. An account of the positive contributions of philosophy to the history of knowledge is absent from Girard's work. This is a problem that Schwager had pointed out to him:

> I'm looking for a formula that explains, on the one hand, all that you say about the violence hidden in philosophy and the Greek logos, and that accepts, on the other hand, the positive contribution of philosophy (e.g., the elaboration of the principle of non-contradiction). All the dialogues of Plato are dominated by this principle, which is one of the bases of modern science and, thus, also of your hypothesis. Philosophy is not only dependent on gospel thinking [*la pensée* évangélique], but also on Greek thought, and I think it is important that we recognize this. But how can we accept this positive side of philosophy, and demonstrate at the same time that the same philosophy does not succeed in shedding any light [à *mettre à jour*] on the real foundations?[92]

While Girard left that question unaddressed, there is little doubt that he agreed on its relevance. There is of course a very important difference between identifying the miscognition of the victimage mechanism in the history of Western philosophy and reducing the entire history of Western philosophy to that miscognition. If mimetic theory surely implies a critique of the Western philosophical tradition, that critique must also set its own boundaries by not limiting the life of philosophical ideas to its sole concerns. Furthermore, mimetic theory must not only acknowledge the positive contributions of the history of Western philosophy, which enabled its formulation, but also its own philosophical implications.

NOTES

1. René Girard, *Conversations with René Girard: Prophet of Envy*, ed. Cynthia L. Haven (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 60.

2. Ibid., 47.

3. René Girard, with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London: Continuum, 2007), 148.

4. Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, Joel Hodge, and Mathias Moosbruggerer, eds., *René Girard and Raymund Schwager: Correspondence, 1974–1991*, trans. Chris Fleming and Shelah Trefle Hidden (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 161. On a different occasion, Girard wrote: "Philosophy is just too complicated for me." See René Girard, "Origins: A View from the Literature," in *Understanding Origins: Contemporary Views on the Origin of Life, Mind, and Society*, ed. Francisco J. Varela and Jean-Pierre Dupuy (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 30.

5. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 25.

6. Ibid., 25. See also Girard's foreword to *La Conversion de l'Art* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 19.

7. René Girard, "Interview: René Girard," *Diacritics* 8, no. 1 (1978), 32.

8. Ibid., 43.

9. Girard, *Conversations with René Girard*, 181.

10. Paul Dumouchel and Andreas Wilmes, "René Girard and Philosophy : an Interview with Paul Dumouchel," *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, no. 1 (2017), 3, http://dx.doi.org/10.22618/TP.PJCV.20171.1.95003. In 2006, René Girard told Pierre-André Boutang and Benoît Chantre that he preferred to be considered as an anthropologist rather than as a philosopher. "Philosophy, he contended, is conceptuality at its most rarefied level, that is where words have the most and the least sense" (*La philosophie c'est la conceptualité au niveau le plus raréfié, donc là où les mots ont le plus de sens et le moins de sens*.) While for philosophers words have "forty meanings, among ethnologists they still have only three." Those statements show that, to Girard, science and philosophy were, to a great extent, irreconcilable. See *René Girard: La Violence et le Sacré*, directed by Pierre-André Boutang (Paris: Editions Montparnasse, 2006), DVD.

11. See, for instance, Girard, *Violence, the Sacred*, and *Things Hidden.* René Girard, *A Discussion with René Girard at Esprit* (*1973*), trans. Andrew J. McKenna with a foreword by Andreas Wilmes (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2022), 42–43.

12. Girard, "Interview: René Girard," 38.

13. This has been summarized by Girard as follows: "However, scientists object that this passage [from the mimetic crisis to the origins of culture] is purely philosophical, because it is too complex (and too hypothetical) to be proved. This is the paradoxical nature of the dialogues I found myself involved with: philosophers hardly believe in 'facts'; scientists are often not interested in moving from the physical to the symbolic ground." Girard, *Conversations with René Girard*, 138.

14. Ibid., 37.

15. René Girard, *Reading the Bible with René Girard: Conversations with Steven E. Berry* (Lancaster, UK: JDL Press, 2015), chapter 3. I only had access to the e-book version of this title, which does not have page references. I have therefore indicated the chapter titles so that readers may more easily find the passages quoted.

16. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 119–31. René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

17. Girard, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, chapter 3.

18. Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986), 189.

19. Gilles Deleuze, *Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone, 1991), 16.

20. Alfred Simon, "Les Masques de la Violence," *Esprit* 11 (November 1973): 524.

21. Girard, *Conversations with René Girard*, 148.

22. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 316.

23. Girard, *Violence, the Sacred, and Things Hidden*, 21.

24. Girard, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, chapter 4.

25. Ibid.

26. Girard, *Violence, the Sacred, and Things Hidden*, 65.

27. Ibid.

28. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), 453–78.

29. Dumouchel, Wilmes, "René Girard and Philosophy," 3.

30. "Dionysus versus the 'Crucified'; there you have the contrast. It is not that their respective martyrdoms differ—but that each one has a different meaning. Life itself, life's eternal fruitfulness and recurrence requires agony, destruction and the will to annihilation. . . . In the other case, the suffering of the 'innocent man crucified' constitutes an objection to this life, a formula for its condemnation." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. R. Kevin Hill and Michael A. Scarpitti (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2017), 576.

31. René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2001), 170–81.

32. René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 133.

33. René Girard, Laurent Linneuil, and Abbé de Tanoüarn, "Facing the Devil's Test: The Truth according to René Girard," trans. Andreas Wilmes and David Dawson, *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, no. 2 (2017): 213, https://doi.org/10.22618/TP.PJCV.20171.2.245014. Originally published in French in *Nouvelle Revue Certitudes* 16 (2005).

34. Thomas Ryba, "Augustine on Hippo," in this volume.

35. Girard, Linneuil, de Tanoüarn, "Facing the Devil's Test," 213.

36. Ibid.

37. "It is sufficient to say of Man everything that the Christian says of his God in order to move from the absolute or Christian Theology to Hegel's absolute philosophy or Science." Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 1980), 73.

38. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 210.

39. Ibid., 135.

40. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

41. Girard, *Violence, the Sacred, and Things Hidden*, 74.

42. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 253.

43. "I think that there is some kind of incompatibility between traditional philosophy and mimetic theory. I feel, for instance, that scholars influenced by Thomism are handicapped in regard to mimetic theory, because they have to work with neatly distinguished categories. Philosophy is looking for logical foundation as well. It is difficult for philosophers to accept a mechanism that triggers opposite effects. Therefore, it always excludes the real anthropological foundation." Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 148.

44. Girard, *Conversations with René Girard*, 138.

45. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 67.

46. At times, Girard's statements on the ignorance of acquisitive mimesis and mimetic rivalry by Western philosophy seem too final (if not to say inaccurate). For instance, his contention that the absence of the problem of acquisitive mimesis in Plato "anticipates the whole of Western thought" (Girard, *Things Hidden*, 7–8), or his statement that his "purpose is to correct this mistake of the [ancient] philosophers by saying that imitation is the best aspect of humanity but also the worst, because it is that endless conflict that makes human society in a way impossible: there is no community without tension, without conflict, there is no mankind without violence and murder" (Girard, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, chapter 1). In the present volume, Sherwood Belanga argues that Girard greatly underappreciated Plato's insights on the violent and conflictual aspects of mimesis. Generally speaking, as shown by most contributors to this book, many great philosophers were aware, like Girard, that "imitation and violence are conjoined." (ibid.). I believe however that Girard's general stance toward the Western philosophical tradition cannot be dismissed on the sole basis of his failure or lack of willingness to acknowledge his forerunners on the matter of *mimesis* and violence. First, the fact that many philosophers saw a link between imitation and violence does not mean that they upheld a theory of desire perfectly similar to that of Girard. Second, as I aimed to show all too briefly in this section of the introduction, Girard has also made the more interesting claim that Western philosophy tends to ignore the fundamental issue of the *undecidability of mimesis* (which is not exactly the same thing as the negative sides of *mimesis* or the question of acquisitive mimesis).

47. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Seth Benardete and Michael Davis (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 1448b.5.

48. Girard, "Interview: René Girard," 34–35.

49. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 1.

50. René Girard, "Origins: A View from the Literature," in *Understanding Origins: Contemporary Views on the Origins of Life, Mind and Society*, ed. Francisco J. Varela and Jean-Pierre Dupuy (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 1992), 31, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-8054-0_2.

51. Ibid., 27.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., 28.

54. Ibid., 37.

55. Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981), 61–171.

56. Ibid., 111.

57. Girard, "Origins," 41–42.

58. Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 124.

59. Girard, "Origins," 42.

60. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 296.

61. Cowdell et al., eds., *René Girard and Raymund Schwager*, 157–58. It should be clear now that one cannot go around Derrida's writings to tackle the question of Girard's stance toward Western philosophy. A thorough comparative reading of Girard and Derrida would nonetheless go beyond the scope of this introduction. On this topic, readers may wish to consult Andrew McKenna's excellent book *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

62. Girard, *Conversations with René Girard*, 59. My emphasis. Note that this quote is taken from an interview in which Girard dwells on Derrida's work.

63. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 88.

64. Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 67.

65. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 43, 163–64.

66. Ibid., 292.

67. Girard, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, chapter 1.

68. For that reason, Plato's philosophy ranked high in Girard's esteem: "If Plato is unique in the history of philosophy because of his fear of mimesis, he is for the same reason closer than anyone to what is essential, closer than primitive religion itself. Yet Plato is also deceived by mimesis because he cannot succeed in understanding his fear, he never uncovers its empirical reason for being." Girard, *Things Hidden*, 14.

69. Girard, *Reading the Bible with René Girard*, chapter 1. We may note here that regarding ancient Greek philosophy, one of Girard's main hypotheses is that the evolution from the pre-Socratics to Aristotle evidences a cultural stabilization of imitation.

70. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 287.

71. As Girard contended: "Even someone as intelligent and as modern as Aristotle thought that the tragic hero who was killed at the end was fundamentally guilty." Girard, *Conversations with René Girard*, 115.

72. Ibid., 171.

73. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 290.

74. Ibid., 291–92.

75. Girard, *Conversations with René Girard*, 59.

76. Girard, "Origins," 42.

77. Ibid., 40.

78. René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 31.

79. Girard, "Origins," 40.

80. Ibid., 41. He nonetheless acknowledged that example as mainly pedagogical and "slightly caricatural."

81. Hervé van Baren, "La conscience, un espace pluriel?," *L'émissaire* (blog), November 14, 2018, https://emissaire.blog/2018/11/14/la-conscience-un-espace-pluriel/.

82. "Our cult of experts is really one with the underground fascination for the obstacle/model of mimetic rivalry. It verges on archaic man's magical faith in terrifying idols. Having repudiated religion in order to be more rational, modern man comes full circle and, in the name of a superior rationality, embraces a rational and technical form of irrationality." René Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*, trans. James G. Williams (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 84.

83. René Girard, "Innovation and Imitation," in "Thought and Novation," ed. Judith Schlanger, special issue, *SubStance* 19, nos. 2–3, issue 62/63 (1990): 11, https://doi.org/10.2307/3684663.

84. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1993).

85. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 28–41

86. "Each mode of subjectivity must found and justify the being of the real in his totality and affirm I am who I am." Girard, *Resurrection from the Underground*, 43

87. Ibid., 42–43.

88. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 159.

89. Ibid., 53.

90. Ibid., 287.

91. Ibid., 288.

92. Cowdell et al., eds., *René Girard and Raymund Schwager*, 163

Contributors

Jeremiah Alberg studied at St. Louis University and Sophia University in Tokyo before doing his PhD in philosophy at the University of Munich. He taught for a number of years at Sophia University, followed by positions in the United States. In 2009, he returned to Japan and has worked since then as professor of philosophy and religion, as well as in peace studies at International Christian University. He has held several administrative posts there, including director of the university library. He has published a study of Rousseau's thought, titled *A Reinterpretation Rousseau: A Religious System* (2007), and a work on hermeneutics, *Beneath the Veil of the Strange Verses: Reading Scandalous Texts* (2013). He has also published several articles on the relationship between Rousseau and Kant. He is interested in the problem of the relationship between religion and violence and is past president of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion.

Sherwood Belangia is an independent scholar, after twelve years working as a philosophy instructor at Augusta University. His academic research primarily focuses on bringing Plato and René Girard into dialogue, and has several published articles on this theme. He co-founded the Georgia Ancient Philosophy Seminar (GAPS), an annual event that brings academics and members of the public into conversation around classic texts. He serves as treasurer and board member of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion, and has been a longtime contributor to its mission and work.

Charles K. Bellinger is professor of theology and ethics at Brite Divinity School, Fort Worth, Texas. He is the author of *The Genealogy of Violence* (2001), *The Trinitarian Self* (2008), *Jesus v. Abortion* (2016), *The Kierkegaard-Girard Option* (2018), *Othering: The Original Sin of*

Humanity (2020), and *The Tree of Good and Evil: Or, Violence by the Law and Against the Law* (2023).

Jean-Marc Bourdin holds a PhD in political philosophy from the University of Paris 8 (2016) and is currently a board member of the Association Recherches Mimétiques (ARM). He is the author of *Duchamp révélé: L'art contemporain à l'épreuve de la théorie mimétique* (2016), *René Girard, philosophe politique malgré lui*, and *René Girard, promoteur d'une science des rapports humains* (2018). He has published several articles, mostly in French, but also a few available in English, including "Killing for Paradise" (*Philosophical Journal on Conflict and Violence*, 2017), "Mimetic Theory and Self-Criticism" (in *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion*, edited by James Alison and Wolfgang Palaver), and "We Are All Migrants" (in *Imagining the Other: Mimetic Theory, Migration, Exclusionary Politics, and the Ambiguous Other*, edited by Dietmar Regensburger und Nikolaus Wandinger, 2023).

Tania Checchi received her bachelor's and master's degrees in philosophy at Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico, where, since 2002, she has taught aesthetics, ethics, and the philosophy of religion. She obtained her PhD from Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid, Spain. Her work deals with the phenomenological tradition and its emphasis on ethics as first philosophy, on interreligious dialogue from the perspective of mimetic theory, and on the philosophical status of the image as a symbolic and ritual effect. She has recently explored the temporal and ideological matrixes of myth and its figurative vehicles, following the lead of E. Levinas, R. Girard and F. W. J. Schelling, among others. She has published a book on Levinas's phenomenology, *Sense and Exteriority*, a number of articles on her main areas of study and has translated works by E. Fackenheim, M. Dufrenne, P. Gilbert, and E. Levinas.

George A. Dunn is a community associate faculty at Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis and a special research fellow at the Institute for the Marxist Study of Religion in a New Era at Hangzhou City University in Hangzhou, China. He is the editor or co-editor of several books, most recently *The Philosophy of Christopher Nolan* (2017) and *A*

New Politics for Philosophy: Perspectives on Plato, Nietzsche, and Strauss (2022).

Jean-Pierre Dupuy is professor emeritus of social and political philosophy, École Polytechnique, Paris, and professor of political science and of science, technology, and society, Stanford University. He is a member of the French Academy of Technology, a spinoff of the Academy of Sciences, and an honorary member of the Conseil Général des Mines, the French High Magistracy that oversees and regulates industry, energy, and the environment. He was the first chair of the Ethics Committee of the French High Authority on Nuclear Safety and Security. He is the director of the Research Program of Imitatio, a San Francisco foundation devoted to the dissemination and discussion of René Girard's mimetic theory. He is author of numerous major works, including, in English, *The Mechanization of the Mind* (2000); *On the Origins of Cognitive Science* (2009); *The Mark of the Sacred* (2013); *Economy and the Future: A Crisis of Faith* (2014); *A Short Treatise on the Metaphysics of Tsunamis* (2015); *How to Think about Catastrophe: Toward a Theory of Enlightened Doomsaying* (2022); *The War That Must Not Occur: An Essay in Nuclear Metaphysics* (2023).

Christine Orsini is *agrégée* in philosophy and vice president of the Association des Recherches Mimétiques (ARM). She is the author of *La pensée de René Girard* (1984) and of *René Girard* ("Que sais-je?," 2018 for the first edition). She also contributed to *René Girard et le problème du mal* (1982) and to the *colloque de* Cerisy *Autour de René Girard* in 1983.

Wolfgang Palaver is a married lay theologian and professor of Catholic social thought at the University of Innsbruck, Austria (where he was also dean of the faculty of Catholic theology from 2013 until 2017). From 2007 to 2011, he was president of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion. He has published books and articles on violence and religion, Thomas Hobbes, Carl Schmitt, Simone Weil, René Girard, and Mahatma Gandhi. His most recent English book is *Transforming the Sacred into Saintliness: Reflecting on Violence and Religion with René Girard* (2020). Previously he published *René Girard's Mimetic Theory* (2013). He is the coeditor of *Passions in Economy, Politics, and the Media* (2005), *The European Wars of Religion* (2016), *The Palgrave Handbook of Mimetic Theory and Religion* (2017),

Mimetic Theory and World Religions (2018), and *Nonviolence and Religion* (2023). In fall 2018, he was a member of the research workshop on religion and violence at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey. From January until June 2021, he conducted a research project on Gandhi's concept of nonviolence at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study.

Thomas Ryba is currently director of religious studies at Purdue University and the president of the Aquinas Educational Foundation. A recipient of Templeton and Metanexus grants, he has authored or coedited eight books and written sixty-eight articles on phenomenology of religion, philosophical theology, and Girardian thought, among other things. He currently serves on the editorial boards of three journals and was a past North American editor for *Religion*, serving on that board for twenty-seven years. His three degrees (BA [honors, philosophy], MA, and PhD [history and literature of religions]) are all from Northwestern University.

Stéphane Vinolo holds a PhD degree in philosophy (Université de Bordeaux) and theology (Université de Strasbourg). He is the author of several books on contemporary and modern philosophy, mostly on Derrida, Marion, Sartre, Badiou, and Girard. He is currently lecturer in contemporary philosophy at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador.

Andreas Wilmes completed his PhD in philosophy at the Université Paris–Descartes. He is a lecturer at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Budapest, Hungary) and editor in chief of the *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence*.

Harald Wydra is professor of politics at the University of Cambridge and Philpott Fellow in Politics at St Catharine's College, where he has taught politics since 2003. He holds a PhD in social and political sciences from the European University Institute in Florence. He held visiting fellowships at the EHESS in Paris and the Australian National University in Canberra. He was visiting professor at the Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, the Cultural Institute at the University of Wrocław, and LUISS University in Rome. His books on Eastern European politics include *Continuities in Poland's Permanent Transition* (2001), *Communism and the Emergence of*

Democracy (2007), and *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe* (coedited with Alexander Wöll, 2007). He also has written extensively on political anthropology, notably, *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality* (coedited with Agnes Horvath and Bjørn Thomassen, 2015) *Politics and the Sacred* (2015), and the *Handbook of Political Anthropology* (coedited with Bjørn Thomassen, 2018). He is a founding editor of *International Political Anthropology* (www.politicalanthropology.org).